

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Bhakti Yoga Book 3

IN SEARCH OF BHAKTI

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Nivaran

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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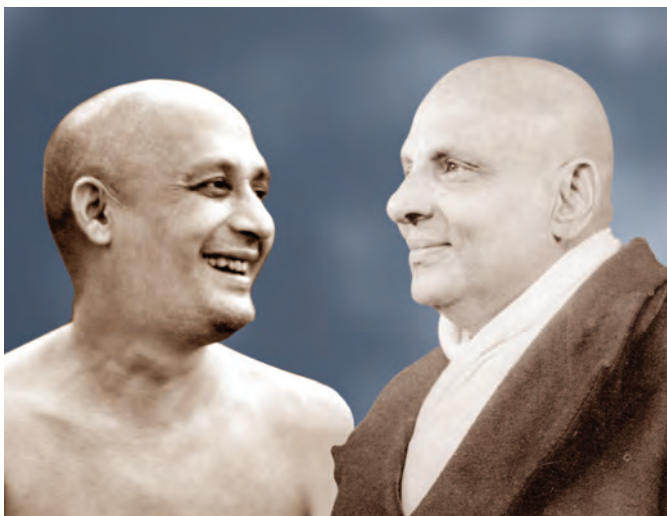
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga vidya has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of

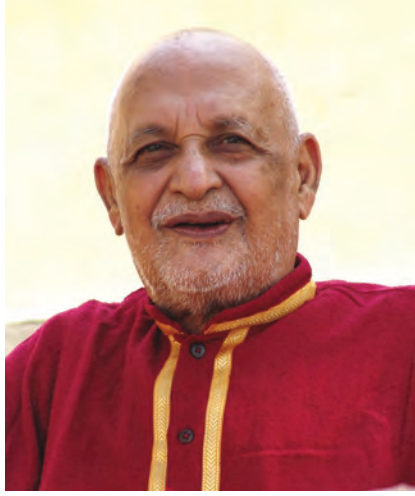


self-realized preceptors which ensures that the yoga vidya remains fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

In 2010, Swami Niranjan established Sannyasa Peeth to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom of yoga vidya.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

Books 3 and 4, *Bhakti Yoga: In Search of Bhakti* and *Bhakti Yoga: In the Presence of Bhakti*, outline the actual disciplines and sadhanas the aspirant has to practise to attain *bhakti*, supreme love. The feeling, the experience and the ultimate state of connection cannot be described, but the steps that lead there can be. They are practical methods of transformation from the negative, restrictive and limiting experience of life to the positive, creative and unlimited one. The transformation takes the aspirant from a tamasic to a sattwic interaction with the world. Sadhana, or the process of transformation, taps into one's rajasic nature. If rajas is invested in redirecting one's thoughts, words and deeds from the mundane to the higher reality, then this human existence will find its purpose fulfilled.

These two books are filled with messages from saints and bhaktas, and anecdotes from their lives and individual journeys. These examples show that bhakti yoga has been practised by seekers since time immemorial. Once the various methods and components which constitute this search were discovered and found essential for attaining the state of bhakti, these bhaktas explained, advocated and exemplified the way of bhakti yoga.

Bhaktas, sages and seers of ancient times established a system of nine steps, limbs or stages, known as the *navanga*, *navadha* or *nava vidha* bhakti yoga. These steps do not always

follow the same sequence. They may not always contain the same recommendations, and definitions may vary, yet each step brings the aspirant closer to the attainment of bhakti.

It has to be kept in mind that, as in all yogas, the spoken traditions were intended by the masters for a specific audience, their disciples. To maintain the purity of the teaching and prevent outsiders from diluting and misinterpreting it, the instructions were often given in encoded, succinct verses to be deciphered and understood by initiates only. Many centuries later, a fresh interpretation is required for today's aspirants. Much of the old language may seem obscure or simply incomprehensible; the message, however, is eternal and as relevant today as it has always been.

An example of this evolution can be found in the term 'padaseva' or 'padasevanam'. In the original translations of the scriptures it was rendered as 'washing, massaging the feet of the Master'. Swami Sivananda still uses this translation. For Swami Satyananda the meaning is clear and simple: selfless service to the Master. Swami Niranjanananda expands the meaning when he speaks of 'adherence to the teachings of the Master'. The best service, the deepest devotion, is shown when the Master's teachings are understood, imbibed and lived. According to Swami Niranjanananda, "Devotion is but unbroken receptivity to the teaching." This understanding always existed, yet it was expressed and worded differently.

The nine limbs or disciplines of bhakti yoga are most extensively described in the *Ramayana*, *Ramacharitamana*s, the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and the Vaishnavachara of tantra. The essence of the nine steps in these teachings is the same, only the emphasis and sequence may vary. In bhakti yoga nothing is bound or restricted by uniformity. What matters is the understanding and applicability of the teaching. Therefore, inconsistency is not a contradiction, only another view, another experience and expression. This should not deter bhakta aspirants, for they are only concerned with yoga sadhana, with practical instructions and guidelines on how to live life in peace, harmony and for the benefit of all.

Satsang

The first and foremost requirement is *satsang*, translated as ‘being in the company of the wise’, ‘positive association’ or ‘encounter with truth’. Whichever translation one may want to adopt, the instruction given is the same: choose and create a positive environment. Aspirants can make the environment of their lives uplifting and inspiring. They have the possibility to avoid the company of those who lead one astray, away from the true and truthful. That is *kusang*, bad company or negative influence which tries to tempt with fleeting pleasures or unrighteousness.

Today, the power of peer pressure is well known to adolescents and their guardians. That power was known to the sages of ancient times and they strongly advised that the conscious choice of ‘good company’ is essential. Not everyone has the opportunity to meet ‘the wise’, yet if no living master is available, books and scriptures of their teachings may substitute for their presence in person. However, everyone has the possibility to choose with whom to share moments of value and worth, moments that take one closer to the underlying truth and beauty of existence.

Satsang is the foundation of the limbs of bhakti yoga described in the following chapters, for no aspirant is an isolated individual. We live in the family, in society and in this world community. Along with our own effort to make a positive contribution, we need the support and encouragement of others. We need satsang.

Swami Sivananda describes the process of satsang with the following words: “Satsang or the company of the wise removes the darkness and impurities of the heart, leads one to the divine path and causes the divine light to shine in one’s heart.”

Qualities to develop

This ‘divine light’ of the heart is expressed through one’s behaviour and interaction in life. It shines with the help of positive, virtuous, divine, sattwic and pure qualities. Every

spiritual tradition exhorts seekers to develop good qualities, not only in a moral or ethical way, but also in pursuit of inner purity and the eradication of negative, destructive and harmful expressions of human nature such as anger, greed, passion, or envy.

The need to discipline this human nature is met by bhakti yoga. It gives directions and methods for rendering human emotions not just human, but divine. The aspirant has access to unlimited options, be they the countless yamas and niyamas found in the Upanishads, or the qualities which endear an aspirant to Sri Krishna, as described in Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Or as the Buddha advises, *Ahimsa prathamam dharma* – non-violence is one's foremost dharma in life, followed by the qualities of *mudita*, *karuna* and *upekkha*, loving kindness, compassion and equanimity. This is a lifelong sadhana or personal program for any bhakta to develop.

Others may feel inclined to adhere to the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament of the Bible, or to Jesus' instruction to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. According to the needs of the time, masters have suggested appropriate qualities for the development of human nature and interactions. Swami Sivananda suggested the 18 ITIES, positive attitudes, or yamas and niyamas, which help the aspirant, starting from serenity and leading to purity of one's total being. Swami Satyananda predicted *seva*, selfless service, selfless dedication to the upliftment of those in need, to be the *prathamam dharma* of the present age, the foremost expression of goodness and righteousness.

Express and accept

The search for bhakti is personal but must be lived and shared with one's fellow beings. There is no point in developing goodness and positive qualities, in becoming sattvic and pure, if it does not benefit those with whom we live, those in need of support and inspiration. Therefore, service to humanity is an essential step for every aspirant.

The lives of saints demonstrate clearly how their spiritual attainment is never kept to themselves, but shared and distributed generously, freely, and without the least expectation.

The need to give of one's accomplishments is a timeless concept, never questioned and always exemplified through the myriad possibilities and shapes that service can take. *Bhakti Yoga Book 3: In Search of Bhakti* presents three modern-day bhaktas and the expression of service they have given through their lives. They will inspire seekers to find their own way to contribute to the welfare of others.

When the effort is made to follow the process of bhakti yoga, and to share the fruit grown and ripened through one's endeavours, the aspirant will discover that, all along there was a helping hand to guide and encourage. This helping hand may be called one's destiny which is being fulfilled and lived, universal consciousness, or God. The bhakta acknowledges and accepts this presence with humility, innocence and the understanding that, in the words of Swami Satyananda, "God is all merciful. Whatever He does, He does correctly and to perfection. God has made a program for everyone."

Through the sadhana prescribed by the masters, the aspirant develops the ability to enhance the individual process of purification, and the sensitivity to be in tune with a transcendental reality. Swami Niranjanananda defines this development as bhakti yoga: "The yogic definition of devotion is fusion of the lower with the higher self. In the state of perfect harmony the energy of God begins to flow in the individual – that is the experience of bhakti yoga."

1

The Many Ninefold Paths

It is so easy to experience God. There is one path that is so easy that there is no other path. This is the path of yoga.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

NAVADHA OR NAVA VIDHA BHAKTI

What are the three aspects of bhakti and bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The three aspects of bhakti and bhakti yoga are religious, personal and cultural. From the religious perspective, bhakti yoga becomes the means of contemplation and adoration of the deity or guru in the form chosen by the devotee, incorporating his faith and belief. Various systems taken from bhakti define with greater clarity the role of religion in a person's life. In that way, bhakti yoga is seen as the yoga of devotion. Bhakti yoga was identified as devotion by religious groups and traditions.

From the personal, individual perspective, bhakti yoga is a process of psychological transformation which takes one through nine stages of personal transformation. These nine stages, steps or modes of bhakti yoga are known as *navadha bhakti yoga*, the ninefold path of bhakti yoga. They are related to personal development and personal transcendence. Versions of the ninefold path may vary in

interpretation or emphasis according to different scriptures, masters or audiences, as for example in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the Vaishnavachara system of Tantra, the *Ramayana* or the *Ramacharitamanas*.

The cultural aspect of bhakti yoga continues to be strong in India. At any music shop one finds that the majority of CDs are of bhajan, kirtan, stotra and mantra. The identification with mantra and chanting is strong in the human psyche. There is the understanding and belief that, when such songs are played there is peace in one's home; there is peace and contentment in one's mind. The vibrations are congenial to the attainment of health and wealth in the house.

What is the aim of the nine modes of bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: The nine modes of bhakti are the ways in which a devotee attains the supreme ideal of life. Any devotee can take up any of these paths and reach the highest state.

What is the purpose of navadha bhakti yoga, the nine steps of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is a process of inner transformation. Bhakti yoga is not a practice, but a sadhana by which one tries to change certain attitudes, certain components of conditioning which exist in one's life as impressions, instincts, or patterns of behaviour, influenced by society, one's culture and family. Bhakti yoga is a process, a sadhana, something that one pursues all the time. It is a process of change in thinking, behaviour and performance. This is the way to excellence, and the only worthwhile goal in life.

The purpose of life is not self-realization, as it is too abstract a concept. A non-transcendental mind cannot understand the transcendental. Therefore, the effort has to be towards transforming the non-transcendental mind into a transcendental mind. Self-realization will be a natural

outcome of this; there is no need to aim for it. The effort has to be to improve the quality of one's thinking, behaviour and performance. For this reason, the acquisition of excellence can be defined as an aim of life. Excellence is combined with the three precepts of dharma: right thinking, right behaviour and right performance. These three pillars of dharma will take one to this level of excellence in life.

One can pick one of the nine sadhanas of bhakti yoga and try to acquire excellence in it. That will make the aspirant ever contented, free of crookedness and pure. In the *Ramayana*, Sri Rama says, "The path of bhakti requires neither mind control, nor sacrifice, nor japa, nor penance, nor fasting. What does it require? A guileless disposition, a mind free from perversity and contentment with whatever may be had." According to Sri Rama, only this is needed to develop bhakti. Thus, after defining the nine stages of bhakti, it is said to just perfect one. One need not go through the other eight stages. If one chooses one stage and perfects it, one will be in good hands.

What is the process of bhakti yoga?

Swami Sivananda: The path of bhakti is the easiest of all and does not go much against the nature of the human inclinations. It slowly and gradually takes the individual to the Supreme without frustrating his human instincts. It is not direct assertion of God, but a progressive realization of Him. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (8:14):

*Ananyachetaah satatam yo maam smarati nityashah;
Tasyaaham sulabhah paartha nityayuktasya yoginah.*

I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers Me (for a long time), not thinking of anything else (with a single or one-pointed mind), O Partha (Arjuna)!

The *Bhagavad Gita* is an authority on the nine modes of bhakti. Sri Krishna illustrates that the various modes of

devotion shall lead one to the Supreme. He says (10:9 and 18:65):

*Machchittaa madgatapraanaa bodhayantah parasparam;
Kathayantashcha maam nityam tushyanti cha ramanti cha.*

Mindful of Me, their life hidden in Me, illumining each other, ever conversing about Me, they are content and joyful. (10:9)

*Manmanaa bhava madbhakto madyaajee maam namaskuru;
Maamevaishyasi satyam te pratijaane priyo'si me.*

Merge thy mind in Me, be My devotee, sacrifice to Me, prostrate thyself before Me, thou shalt come even to Me. I pledge thee My truth: thou art dear to Me. (18:65)

What is the common factor in the nine ways of developing bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: Devotion to God is developed in nine different ways. It is supreme attachment to God through a bhava predominant in the devotee. Intense love is the common factor in all the nine modes. Exclusive love for God is expressed through various methods. All bhaktas of this type are above the formalities of the world. They are untouched by the laws of human dharma and are out and out concerned with God.

Devotion to God is developed in nine different ways. It is supreme attachment to God with intense inner feeling. Intense love is the common factor in all the nine modes. Love for the world and love for God are diametrically opposed. One has to be renounced for the attainment of the other. This renunciation can be acquired through the nine forms of bhakti. In illustration of this there is a verse in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the free translation of which is:

What was the conduct of the fowler? What was the age of Dhruva? What was the learning possessed by Gajendra? What was the caste of Vidura? What was the

effort done by Ugrasena? What was the bodily beauty of Kubja? What was the wealth of Sudama? Madhava is satisfied only with intense devotion (bhakti), not with other qualities possessed by persons.

The fowler was a killer of animals. Dhruva was a boy of five years. Gajendra was an elephant devoid of scholarship. Vidura was a shudra by caste. Ugrasena did no self-effort but simply sat without doing anything. Kubja was a very ugly woman with a hunchback. Sudama was one of the poorest of men. However, God did not consider these defects of His devotees. He took only their devotion and sent His blessings upon them all.

Good conduct which is in accordance with perfect moral law is an auxiliary to pure bhakti and it follows the true bhakta wherever he goes. One cannot develop true devotion to God if one is crooked in one's heart, has objects of love in this world, is tempted by charming worldly things; if one wishes to take care of wife, children and relatives, feed the body well, earn a great name in the world, establish a permanent fame on earth, and if one does not like to part with the alluring contents of the world. Perfect detachment from all objects is a preliminary to real devotion. Vairagya is the product of real love for God. One who has love for the world cannot have love for God. Where there is *kama*, desire, there cannot be Rama, and where there is Rama there cannot be kama.

Why is there a need for various stages in bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is a powerful tool for the generation and expression of love without boundaries: universal love. However, the process of bhakti yoga, although it sounds simple, is complex, as one has to recondition the existing human nature and re-channel the forces that flow out to converge at a single point of focus. That point can be called God, the force of creation; it can be called guru, the energy that removes ignorance and darkness; it can be

called love, prem. The literal meaning of the word *prem* is to appreciate and be identified with something intensely and silently. In that identification there is absolute peace. There is not even the birth of a desire. It is a state of contentment, wholeness and fulfilment. However, to come to this point basic changes have to take place in attitude, beliefs and the expression of love, in order to purify oneself. These areas are covered in bhakti yoga.

The process of bhakti yoga seems simple, just as the processes in hatha yoga, raja yoga or kriya yoga seem simple, yet the aim is quite different from the process. The aim of hatha yoga is purification and harmony of the body. The concept of harmony of the body is quite complex, yet the process is simple: asana, shatkarma and so forth. The aim of raja yoga is self-management; the process is yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. The purpose of kundalini yoga is to awaken the dormant potential; the process is chakras, mantras, yantras. The aim of bhakti yoga is to identify with the pure nature of emotions, love and spirit. The process is through kirtan, mantra, adoration, contemplation, prayer. However, these transformations have to take place in an area of the personality that has not yet been mapped or charted. Therefore, there are nine stages to bhakti yoga, and one should be able to attain each stage, experience it and live it. These stages are focusing and fulfilling one's human dharma by performing the appropriate action in a graceful manner.

To be a bhakta, is it necessary to practise all of the nine modes of devotion?

Swami Sivananda: One-pointed absolute devotion and self-surrender to God on the path of bhakti is developed in nine different ways known as nava vidha bhakti. Which mode the bhakta chooses is determined by the *bhava* or spiritual nature and attributes predominant in the devotee.

Parikshit attained Him by hearing His stories; Vyasa's son by singing His glories; Prahlada by constantly remembering

Him; Lakshmi by serving at His feet; Prithu by worshipping Him; Akrura by adoring Him; Hanuman by being His humble servant; and Vali by dedicating his all to Him. They attained salvation equally, though by different methods.

Does one have to perfect all nine stages of navadha bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: No. Bhakti does not follow a linear path. Nine stages have been defined, yet each stage is connected to the final one. They are not connected to each other. The first stage is connected to the ninth, the second stage is connected to the ninth, the third stage is connected to the ninth, and so on. Wherever one is on the path, if one is able to live that stage fully then one is bound to reach the ninth stage. When one lives one stage fully one will bypass every other stage.

What part does ritual play in the ninefold path of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are nine dimensions of bhakti in which the first form is satsang and not ritual. The last form is meditative identification with the object of worship, *sayuja*. Repetition of a mantra is part of bhakti yoga yet it is not saying a prayer. Prayer is not considered to be part of bhakti yoga. Prayers are what one asks God, “Provide me with this, provide me with that.”

Bhakti yoga clearly states that people who ask for fulfilment of their desires through worship are treading the wrong path. They are confused, for on one hand they say, “God, you know everything, you exist everywhere,” and on the other hand they say, “But nevertheless let me tell you what my problems are.” This personal confusion expresses itself on the path of bhakti, there is no doubt about it.

Reading of scriptures and holy books to uplift the human spirit is a part of bhakti. Repeating the name of God, either in the form of kirtan, music or dance is part of bhakti. Repeating a mantra is part of bhakti. Identifying with the cosmic reality and seeing that divine godly nature in everything is part of bhakti.

May rituals be performed if one wishes to do so, or are they contrary to the ninefold path?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are people who have a religious bent of mind, and to improve their own faith and conviction such rituals can be adopted. However, according to tradition there are three different dimensions in human life.

The first dimension of the first stage is external ritual. Everyone is free to do so according to their own likes and dislikes, according to their cultural and religious upbringing. This dimension is known as *karmakanda*, where one is free to worship divinity as per one's choice or as per the mandates of a religion.

The second dimension is *upasana*, mental worship or mental identification with the divinity. The third is *jnana*, experienced knowledge of divinity. It is not just an intellectual concept but something which one experiences, something which one realizes, something which one knows.

Rituals as such are not part of the bhakti yoga system. That is an individual choice according to one's belief, according to one's inclination. If one has that trait of personality, if one has that inclination, one can definitely use rituals to help the journey, to help one's faith and conviction develop, however, it is not part of the traditional, spiritual precepts.

Is there any connection between the path of bhakti and maya or rational thinking?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is a term which is used externally to define something beyond the range of maya, of linear thinking. Bhakti is not devotion. It may be translated and defined as devotion in the absence of any other description or word, yet bhakti is definitely not devotion, or contemplation of God. Bhakti means coming closer to the essence of the Self.

The nine steps of bhakti can be seen not from a mystical angle but from a practical one. The final aim of bhakti is the merger of consciousness with the Divine Presence. That

is known as sayujya, merger, fusion or union, but before this stage, there are other stages of bhakti which act at the deeper level of mind to transform the mental structure, the mental conditioning. In the *Bhagavad Gita* there are various definitions of bhakti. In the *Ramayana* there is another definition of bhakti. The words may vary but the state, the stage of experience, is the same.

What is the outcome of the nine stages?

Swami Niranjanananda: Through the nine stages of bhakti transformations take place in the realm of consciousness and in the realm of mind, attitude and behaviour. The processes to attain these are said to be kirtan, mantra, chanting, contemplation, prayer and meditation. The aim of bhakti yoga is to go through these nine steps one by one and to become established in the state of pure love where one is free from fear. Then one becomes one with God.

There are recorded events in history; such things do happen. When Saint Theresa of Avila went into ecstasy, the signs of the stigmata would appear on her hands and feet. When she came out of this state of ecstasy, the signs would disappear. That means the level of identification is so deep that even the body can change because it is simply compressed energy. When that energy is freed, it becomes one with the divine energy. This is the miracle of understanding and living the belief of 'Let Thy will be done'.

What are the stages which are less well known?

Swami Sivananda: Restrain the senses and speak the truth. Develop humility, patience and the spirit of self-sacrifice. God is quite close to you in your heart. Live in Him and feel yourself merge with Him. You can practise surrender by remembering and singing His name always. Feel His presence everywhere, see Him in every face and realize Him. That is your highest duty.

The gopis practised this mode of upasana with Sri Krishna. They lost themselves in Sri Krishna, and lost them-

selves in God consciousness. In this way, these village girls attained the Supreme. Self-surrender leads to the highest stage of spiritual life and can be practised by observing the following stages:

- *Satsanga*, company of saints
- *Swadhaya*, self-study and study of devotional books
- *Shraddha*, faith
- *Sadhana bhakti*, devotion to sadhana, mantra repetition, constant remembrance, kirtan
- *Nishtha*, devoutness
- *Ruchi*, taste for hearing and chanting the names and glories of the Lord
- *Rati*, intense attachment to the Lord that softens the heart
- *Sthayi bhava*, steadfastness
- *Jivanmukta*, liberation while living
- *Maha bhava*, living in the Lord.

Sri Krishna teaches Arjuna that total and exclusive self-surrender alone can give him peace and relieve him of anxieties and concerns. One who studies the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Srimad Bhagavatam* will come to know the great importance given to total self-surrender; for self-surrender is the annihilation of individual consciousness and the attainment of absolute consciousness, which is equal to *nirvikalpa samadhi* or direct realization. The devotee flies to the state of supreme devotion and merges himself in God. Worldly consciousness vanishes into universal consciousness. Man becomes God, the mortal becomes immortal.

In reality, the nine modes of devotion are reducible to one: self-surrender. The bhakta starts with hearing the stories and attributes of God and slowly ascends the rungs in the ladder of bhakti yoga to ultimately reach the highest rung: self-surrender. The will of the devotee becomes one with the Cosmic Will. The devotee becomes one with the God. He feels and sees the God as Rama in every hair follicle of his body, in every atom and molecule. This state is unthinkable and indescribable. As his egoism is totally destroyed, Sri Rama directly speaks and works through his organs.

How do these stages evolve one after the other?

Swami Sivananda: Through satsang and swadhyaya comes admiration for the Divine. From admiration comes shraddha and from shraddha comes devotion to God. Then the devotee practises sadhana bhakti, practices such as japa, smarana and kirtan. He burns sins and obstacles to attain his devotion by the above practice. From sadhana bhakti he develops nishta and from nishta comes *ruchi*, the taste for hearing and chanting the names and glories of God. Then comes rati which softens the heart. When rati is intensified it is called sthayi bhava. When sthayi bhava is intensified, it is called maha bhava or prema maya. Now the devotee drinks the prem rasa and lives in God. Such a devotee is dead to the world and its attractions. He remains like one unconcerned even to the activities of his body. He reaches the state of jivanmukti or liberation while living.

BHAKTI YOGA IN THE SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

What are the nine steps of bhakti yoga in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*?

Swami Niranjanananda: The *Srimad Bhagavatam* describes the ninefold path of bhakti as:

1. *Shravana:* Listening to the qualities and stories of God.
2. *Kirtan:* Singing the name and qualities of God.
3. *Smarana:* Continuous remembrance of the name and mantra of God.
4. *Pada seva:* Merging oneself into the service of God.
5. *Archana:* A form of ritual, rite or external worship, such as burning incense, a candle, doing arati.
6. *Vandana:* Mental worship.
7. *Dasya bhava:* Seeing oneself as a sevak or servant.
8. *Sakhya bhava:* Seeing oneself as a friend of God.
9. *Atmanivedana:* Total surrender of oneself.

How can the nine steps in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* be described?

Swami Niranjanananda: One can listen to the names of the Almighty and serve other creatures while remembering Him. One can free the mind of anxiety and remember God. Anxiety is a natural human tendency. People worry if marriage is not taking place and they worry if it does. If there are no children it is a matter of worry and if there is a child there is worry. There is worry if there is no job and worry when there is one. People are never free of anxiety, and that anxiety is always connected with worldly objects and matters. Even when one sleeps at night, the thought process of anxiety is seen in the form of dreams. When one is awake, the same thought appears in the mind again and again.

When one is preoccupied by a thought, one loses sleep. When a distressing thought takes hold of the mind, one is unable to cope with the pain. When a pleasant thought obsesses one, one begins to imagine the heights of ecstasy. This is the influence of thoughts linked with worldly objects and experiences. If one links one's thoughts to God and the attention is drawn to Him; if one thinks about and remembers Him again and again, just as one remembers the son or daughter, husband or wife, then He will draw one's thoughts towards Himself. It is said:

*Shravanam kirtanam Vishnoh smaranam padasevanam,
archanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atmanivedanam.*

Listening to stories of the Divine, singing the glories of the Divine, remembering the Divine, serving humanity, giving up doership, letting go of one's ego, attitude of being the servant of Divine, attitude of being a friend to God, surrender to the Divine.

These words sum up the tradition of bhakti yoga. The path the sages have described is simple yet deeply psychological. People think that bhakti yoga is easy: 'You do not have to do anything, only think of God.' Yes, that is true. One does not

have to do anything in bhakti yoga, only think of God, and the experience one has during this thought process is the beginning of bhakti. The meaning of bhakti is love for God. The devotee imbibes this love through *shravana*, listening; *kirtan*, devotional songs; *smarana*, remembrance; *padasevana*, service at the feet; *archana*, worship; *vandana*, praise; *dasya bhava*, the attitude of servitude; *sakhya bhava*, the sentiment of friendship; and *atmanivedana*, surrendering and dedicating one's entire self to the Divine. These processes cast the mind into the mould of bhakti.

How would you describe the nine stages listed in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*?

Swami Satyananda: There are many methods which the aspirant can find out for himself through his own experiences. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, nine modes of unfolding bhakti are given as follows:

1. *Shravanam* is hearing stories about the divine incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Christ, Buddha and so forth.
2. *Kirtanam* is chanting the names of divinity.
3. *Smaramam* is continual remembrance of divinity in any form.

These three modes of expression – *shravanam*, *kirtanam* and *smaranam* – tend to harmonize the mind and remove any mental blockages, helping the mind to become more sattwic. Tension and excessive egoism tend to drop away and the aspirant becomes more and more one-pointed. The aspiration to develop divine qualities is unfolded. *Smaramam* is especially powerful and has been the main spiritual practice of many great bhaktas, such as Kabir. It is continuous *japa* and continual remembrance. It is the remembrance and feeling that is important. This intensifies awareness and induces one-pointedness of mind.

4. *Padasevanam* is service of the guru or service done in the name of the divine. This involves serving one's guru or doing work in the name of the divine. It means doing *karma yoga*, working earnestly to the best of one's ability.

This also reduces the power of the ego and makes the mind one-pointed.

5. *Archanam*, or ritualistic worship and offerings, generally follows prescribed rules and formulas. It is a method of unfolding inner potential. These ritualistic forms of worship can be powerful when done with awareness and feeling. It is an integral part of most religions including tantra.
6. *Vandanam* is mental worship of everyone and everything as being the form of divinity. It involves mental prostrations to every being, everything which is really the finite form of the Supreme. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says: "The sky, the air, the fire, water, earth, stars, planets, all the directions of the compass, trees, rivers, the seas and all living things constitute the body of the Supreme." Therefore, the bhakta should mentally bow down and worship everything, knowing that he is worshipping the forms of the Supreme.
7. *Dasyam* is the feeling of being the servant of the Divine. One tries to do only the will of the Divine with the attitude of being the servant. This helps very much to reduce the stranglehold of egoism.
8. *Sakhyam* is the attitude of friendship. At this stage the bhakta feels as though he is on personal and intimate terms with the Supreme. He treats the Supreme as a close friend who is always in his company.
9. *Atma nivedanam* is total surrender. This leads to perfect union where the lover, loving and the loved become one.

How do the nine modes of bhakti contain other yogas?

Swami Sivananda: In the nine modes of bhakti yoga one will find a synthesis of the three main yogas: karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. Padasevana and dasya are the sadhanas of karma yoga. God is seated in all hearts. How is one to serve His feet, except through the service of every being in the world? Dasya is regarding oneself as the servant of God, and God is in everyone. Therefore, one should gladly, cheerfully and willingly serve all. This is karma yoga.

Kirtan, archana, vandana and sakhya are limbs of bhakti yoga. Shravanam, smaranam and atmanivedanam constitute the threefold process of jnana yoga sadhana, viz. shravana, manana and nidhidhyasana. Everywhere one will find synthesis. In this Kali Yuga, the yoga of synthesis alone is the best to adopt if one wishes to have rapid spiritual progress.

What are the nine steps of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, nine precepts are given: shravanam kirtanam Vishnosmaranam padasevanam archanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atmanivedanam. Out of these, shravana, kirtan and smarana belong to one category; padasevana, archana and vandana belong to the second category; and dasya, sakhya and atmanivedana belong to the third category. *Shraddha* or faith is developed and expanded through *dasya bhava*, the attitude of service, *sakhya bhava*, the attitude of friendship, and *atmanivedana*, self-surrender. When this is achieved, the relationship with one's Beloved becomes pure.

Many people practise the ritualistic aspect of bhakti. They make an altar or a small temple in the house. An idol or a picture of their ishta is placed there, and they worship it daily, offering flowers and incense. That is also a discipline. When one follows a ritual, the mind becomes happy and peaceful. If there are any worries, the mind finds consolation in the fact that the problem has been brought to God's notice. This kind of worship is the result of a natural inner urge to connect with a higher power.

How does the *Srimad Bhagavatam* describe the ninefold path of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are the nine ways of bhakti sadhana prescribed in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. The first is shravana, listening to the stories of God. The second is kirtan, singing the qualities of God. The third is smarana, remembering the name of God. The fourth is padasevana, cultivating a feeling of universal oneness, through service

at the feet of God. The fifth is archana, surrendering all one's deeds to God through worship, ritual and reverence. The sixth is vandana, the humbling of one's ego, bowing one's head. The seventh is dasya, serving, seva. The eighth is sakhya, having the attitude of a friend, and the last is atmanivedana, surrendering oneself totally.

In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, bhakti sadhana has been explained simply with emphasis on three things: *darshan* or inner vision, *shravana* or hearing, and *chintan* or contemplation. Through shravana, darshan and chintan the mind becomes one with God. No matter how misshapen a vessel, when liquid is poured into it, it takes on the shape of the vessel. As long as the liquid remains in the vessel it will retain the same shape and form. Similarly, when one hears the name of the Divine, when one contemplates the qualities of the Divine, when one brings to mind the form of the Divine, the mind takes on the same aspect as the Divine.

Shravana, kirtan and smarana come in the first category of bhakti in which the name is important. In the second category are padasevana, archana and vandana; here service, worship and prayer are important. In the third division are included dasya, sakhya and atmanivedana, which are expressions of one's faith in and relationship with the Divine.

The *Srimad Bhagavatam* divides navadha bhakti into these three categories. It also states that if one practises shravana, the mind will become engrossed in God. If one practises kirtan, the mind will remember His name and qualities. If one practises smarana, one will remember Him all the time just as one remembers one's child who lives in one's mind and heart.

A mother lets her little child play around as she works in the kitchen. The child plays on the floor while she cuts vegetables, lights a fire, cleans the rice and dal, and does her work. When she finds that the child has wandered to a place of possible danger, she immediately removes the child to a place of safety and then goes back to her work. Her constant awareness of the child is called smarana.

Sri Swami Satyananda says, “I do not always remember Swami Sivananda. I do not keep repeating his name throughout the day, however, I feel his presence constantly. When I turn around I feel as if Swami Sivananda is standing there. When I walk I feel as if Swami Sivananda is walking beside me. Wherever I look I see only his form.” This is the full expression of faith in a disciple’s life. There is a Hindi saying which describes this state:

*Jahan kahin dekha Prabhuji ki maya.
Sabke dil me hai Prabhuji ki chhaya.*

Wherever I look, I see the play of God.
In every heart resides the shadow of God.

How do the nine modes of devotion differ in the way bhakti is cultivated by the devotee?

Swami Sivananda: Shravana and satsang are the first forms of navadha bhakti. One cannot attain shravana bhakti without the company of saints or the wise, which is *satsang*. Mere reading for oneself can only give a partial experience and doubts will crop up. They cannot be easily solved without the instruction of an experienced teacher to set the devotee on the right path. Without satsang, sadhana does not become perfect and strong. Mere austerities are not the end of sadhana. Satsang illumines the devotee and removes impurities. It is only then that subtle truths are grasped well by the devotee. Sri Krishna says to Uddhava that nothing but satsang alone can put an end to all worldly attachments.

How is it possible to understand the nine modes of bhakti yoga?

Swami Sivananda: *Kirtan* is singing God’s name and glories and is the easiest form of worship. The devotee is thrilled with divine emotion and loses himself in the love of God. He weeps with joy when thinking of the glory of God; his voice becomes choked with emotion and he flies into a state of divine ecstasy. He sings and dances in ecstasy and inspires

others to join him. Only praising the name of the Divine and His lila in melody for the purposes of keeping the flame of bhakti burning in our hearts can be termed kirtan.

Kirtan is one of the easiest ways to control the mind, the most important sadhana on the path of God-realization. When the mind is attracted towards God, the heart experiences a selfless, blissful state. Kirtan has a double effect – it gives pleasure to the mind and at the same time purifies the heart. Therefore, kirtan is the best method suited for all people.

The devotee is ever engaged in japa of God's name and in describing His glories to one and all. Wherever he goes he begins to sing and praise God. He requests all to join his kirtan. He sings and dances in ecstasy. He makes others also dance.

Such practices should be the outcome of a pure heart and should not be merely a show. God knows the inner secret of all and none can cheat him. There should be perfect straightforwardness, and all actions should be natural outpouring from the heart. This is the easiest of all modes of approach to God.

Smarana is unbroken remembrance of the name and form of the Divine at all times and is the most potent and difficult mode of devotion. The mind does not think of any object of the world, but is ever engrossed in thinking of the glories and virtues of God alone. Smarana includes hearing stories of God and teaching them to others, talking of God and meditation on the attributes of God. Japa also comes under this category. In smarana bhakti, God is to be remembered at all times without break, as remembrance has no time limit. The devotee has no other duty in the world except remembrance of God. This alone can destroy all worldly samskaras and can turn the mind away from sense-objects. Remembrance of God makes the mind introverted and is a difficult sadhana as it is not possible to remember God at all times. Remembrance is equal to concentration or meditation and requires all the qualities cultivated by a raja yogi. The

bhakta should not be perturbed by censure or ridicule from the world. Smarana is swimming against the forceful current of the river of maya and leads to exclusive meditation on God.

Padasevana is serving at the Lord's feet, although no mortal being has the fortune to be able to practise this method of worship, for God is not visible to the physical eyes. However, it is possible to serve the image of God in idols and better still, to take the whole of humanity as God. Padasevana is service of the sick and the poor. It is service of the whole of humanity at large.

Service to the Lord's feet can be done through formal worship to one's guru, to images of God in temples or one's home, or to a mental image of God. There are many ritual forms of padasevana such as: observing the sacred feet of the Lord again and again with devotional gaze; worshipping and serving them; sipping the sacred water in which God's feet have been washed; worshipping the sandals of the Divine; meditating on them and praying to them; taking the dust of God's feet and applying it to the forehead; serving in holy shrines and places of pilgrimage and places where God incarnated for the good of humanity; regarding the Ganga as directly flowing from the feet of God; worshipping, bathing in and drinking of such divine water. This kind of upasana destroys all worldly attachments and allows the mind to think exclusively of God.

Bharata served the sandals of Sri Rama throughout the period of his exile. What devotion! He kept them on the throne and worshipped them as representing Sri Rama himself. He ruled the kingdom in the name of Sri Rama's sandals, acting only as the servant of Sri Rama. This is worship through padasevana.

Ahalya felt her life fulfilled, having obtained the dust of God's feet. It is said in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*: "He who has taken shelter at the feet of the Lord, which is the refuge of saints and full of blessedness, for him the ocean of worldly existence becomes as shallow as the hoof-print of a calf. The

supreme state is already attained by him. Worldly miseries and difficulties do not appear before him.”

Sri Lakshmi Devi is enjoying this practice of devotion as she is ever serving the feet of Hari. Vishnu is resting His feet on the lap of Sri Lakshmi. She is the example of one engaged in padasevana bhakti.

Archana is upasana of God through worship of an image of divinity in whatever form attracts the devotee. Archana can be performed with external materials or merely through a strong inner feeling, though the latter is an advanced form of worship. The purpose of upasana is to please God and purify the heart through surrender of the ego and love of God. Serving the poor and sick and worshipping saints is also archana of God in His manifest and living forms, for God is everywhere and in everything. The upasaka should consider all creatures, even down to a worm, as forms of God. Offerings to God need not necessarily be rich and costly things. It is the feeling of love for God that He takes into account and not the material that is offered. He is pleased even with leaves and mere water.

Vandana is worship through prayer and prostration. This form of bhakti includes humble prostration, touching the earth with the eight limbs of the body, *ashtanga namaskara*, bowing down with faith and reverence before a form of God, bowing to all beings as forms of the one God, and getting absorbed in divine love. Prayer enters people’s lives when they feel that they are in need of something else which is beyond their capacity and not always humanly possible. They resign themselves to God and pray for his help and guidance. His response is felt through an omnipotent inner force that listens to their prayers and fulfils their wish once they have shown that they are sincere and faithful. The *Srimad Bhagavatam* says: “The sky, air, fire, water, earth, stars, planets, the cardinal points (direction), trees, rivers, seas and all living beings constitute the body of Sri Hari. The devotee should bow before everything in absolute devotion, thinking that he is bowing before God Himself.”

The seventh mode of bhakti is *dasya bhakti*, worship of God through the servant sentiment and the eighth mode is *sakhya bhakti*, where the bhakta considers himself a friend of God.

The final mode of bhakti is *atmanivedana*, self-surrender. The upasaka starts with hearing the stories of God and slowly ascends the different rungs in the ladder of bhakti, until ultimately the highest rung, *atmanivedana*, is reached. Here, the devotee offers everything to God, including body, mind and soul, and keeps nothing for himself. He gives himself up to God and has no personal or independent existence. God takes care of him and treats him as Himself. This devotee treats happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain as gifts sent by God, and does not attach to them. He considers himself as a puppet of God and an instrument in His hands. He gives his ego over to God, and God takes care of everything for him. In this form of bhakti, the will of the devotee becomes one with the Divine, and he enjoys the divine splendours of God.

VAISHNAVACHARA: BHAKTI YOGA OF TANTRA

What is the aim of the vaishnavachara system?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Satyananda says that bhakti is simply an emotion, comprising love, faith and conviction. These are the three aspects of bhakti. How does one develop transcendental love? How does one develop faith and conviction? To cultivate these qualities of bhakti, the vaishnavachara system of tantra describes a beautiful progression which has nine *angas*, or limbs.

How is bhakti yoga incorporated in the body of tantra?

Swami Niranjanananda: Just as raja yoga is known as *ashtanga yoga*, the eightfold path of yoga, the ninefold path of tantra is known as *navanga tantra*, from the nine codes of conduct or *nava acharas*. The nava acharas represent the entire body of tantra and describe the progressive stages of growth

and evolution. The nine sequential stages are: vedachara, vaishnavachara, shaivachara, dakshinachara, vamachara, aghorachara, yogachara, siddhantachara and kaulachara.

In each achara, one specific aspect of awareness has been highlighted. This awareness relates to the cultivation of a specific attitude, type of interaction and the effort that is needed in life to uplift oneself and to overcome limitations and restrictions. In this way, each conduct provides a focus, an aim and a direction to develop in life.

In all the acharas, the prescribed conduct is a complete sadhana in itself. It is not just a tool of mental modification; rather, each achara covers the physical-mental unit and the mental-spiritual unit.

The second achara, *vaishnavachara*, cultivates faith, purifies the sentiments and sublimates the emotions. The aim is *shuddhi*, purification of emotions, mind, speech and lifestyle. The emotions are channelled and transformed in a creative and uplifting way. Vaishnavachara helps to cultivate inner strength to allow one to rise above the struggles in life and approach difficulties as challenges to be overcome. Thus, vaishnavachara indicates union with faith and constitutes the bhakti aspect of the tantras.

As a result of attaining the qualities of restraint, harmony and detachment while in vedachara, one's life becomes more organized. Thus through this first achara the foundation is laid to move into the next achara, which is vaishnavachara.

From vaishnavachara onwards, effort is needed to transform one's nature, personality, and mental and emotional behaviour with the goal of attaining purity. The term *vaishnavachara* means to follow the conduct of Vishnu, also called Narayana, the symbol of purity and bhakti. In vaishnavachara the effort involves the cultivation of faith, purification of sentiments and emotions, and the proper management of the emotions in order to use their power, their *shakti*, and dive deeper into the subtle dimensions where one's strengths lie hidden. The catalyst to bring out the inner strength is faith and conviction.

What is the first step on the spiritual path?

Swami Niranjanananda: The attainment of *shuddhi*, purity, is the first step of spiritual life. Without cultivating purity one cannot progress along the spiritual path. Even in pranayama, the first practice taught is nadi shodhana, purification of the pranic channels. Introduction into pranayama commences with the clearing of the pranic channels. Similarly, pratyahara is practised in preparation for meditation. Pratyahara refines the awareness and clears the mind so the mind can become free to enter a state of meditation. Sweeping the mind clean is pratyahara, and arranging the mind, placing the right things in the right places, is dharana. Lying down comfortably on a sofa and enjoying life is meditation. Going to sleep on a sofa in total bliss is samadhi. In this way, throughout spiritual life, shuddhi is always the first step.

In vaishnavachara, general cleanliness to purify the environment forms a part of the routine of life. Bhakti yoga purifies the emotions, pranayama purifies the pranas and meditation cleans the thoughts. Meditation gets rid of any specks of dust, or negative vrittis, so that one achieves *shuchita*, or cleanliness of thought. With various practices, purity of body, mind and speech have to be acquired.

Purification requires restraining the negative tendencies of the mind, abstaining from unregulated passionate behaviour, avoiding injury and harm to other people, animals and insects, and cultivating *bhakti*, or channelling and transforming the emotions in a creative and uplifting way. In order to maintain mental and emotional purity, one often has to follow certain abstinences in vaishnavachara. These abstinences can take the form of different *tapasyas*, austerities, and *sanyams*, restraints. One begins to observe and work through the factors that limit one's creative expression by balancing and altering one's lifestyle. Sometimes, for householders, even sexual restrictions have to be followed in order to withdraw the attention from the sensorial world.

In every situation, both external and internal factors have to be taken into account to attain balance. A diabetic patient will not be helped only by taking tablets or insulin injections. To manage the condition properly a diabetic must also regulate the diet. In the same manner, tantra states that along with the external practices, one must work internally with the mind. Both the outer and inner, the exoteric and esoteric, processes must merge together.

To develop purity, one must cultivate an identity with one's pure nature. In meditation one should mentally repeat, 'I am not this body or the experiences connected or associated with this body. I am not this mind or the experiences associated and connected with this mind. I am the luminous self, the untainted and the pure'. One should identify with that internal purity and develop the feeling of purity to the maximum extent possible. For some people the maximum effort may be five percent, for others twenty percent. Even if one percent of purity is attained, it creates the first step in realizing the transcendental.

This effort begins by realizing that the transcendental nature is contained in everything – in oneself and in others. One needs to recognize each individual, not as an independent physical person, but as a spiritual person. One should be able to recognize and perceive in each individual the spiritual strength and not the material mindset. As the ability to visualize the spiritual nature in all develops, so does the ability to perceive the divine trait within all, and this is also the aim and philosophy of Advaita Vedanta – cultivating the ability to see oneself in others, to feel that all are one, not strangers. This is vaishnavachara: the attainment of purity in thought, in mind, in character, in behaviour; the attainment of creativity in action; and the identification with the spiritual nature in oneself and others, realizing that all are one in spirit. The shape, size and colour may be different, but the spirit which is luminous in each and every one is the same.

How does one need to understand bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: People sometimes think of bhakti yoga as a religious activity or religious process; however, when the word 'yoga' is added to 'bhakti', it changes the meaning completely. It becomes a process of inner psychological transformation, and not the path of adoration, worship and devotion. Thus, bhakti can be understood in two ways: as bhakti yoga, and as the ritual path of bhakti. In vaishnavachara it is not the ritualistic aspect of bhakti which is the focus, but rather bhakti yoga. The aim is to positively transform the emotions and sublimate those emotions to experience the true self, the true nature.

What is the first aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: In vaishnavachara, the first form of bhakti is satsang. Satsang is used to change the mental attitude and behaviour, and to make it more positive and constructive. Not satsang in the sense of discussion, lecture or debate. Satsang does not mean a speech. *Satsang* means to be in company of truth. How can one be in the company of the truth? By choosing the right association, including choosing the right husband or wife, and the right friends. This means choosing to associate with people who can inspire one to do good things, who uplift, encourage and are a positive influence in one's life. The company of virtuous, good, gentle, pious and sattwic people elevates the mind and energy.

In contrast, one is advised to reject associations with people who gossip and criticize, and who do not inspire one to live a sattwic life. Association with the negative, bad and destructive depletes one's energy and positive nature. People who are a destructive and negative influence should be shunned, rejected, ignored and avoided. This has been stated in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali (1:33):

*Maitreekarunaamuditopekshaanaam
sukhaduhkhapunyaapunyaavishayaanaam
bhaavanaatashchittaprasaadanam.*

Be friendly with those who are content. Be compassionate towards those who are in pain. Be happy for those who are virtuous. Practise indifference to the crooked. Cultivate these attitudes and the mind becomes purified and peaceful.

Ignore the crooked, look at the flower and not the thorn. In this way, an outer act of separation from negative influences brings one closer to a sense of happiness, joy and positivity. Positive associations will give birth to positive expressions, and destructive associations will give birth to destructive expressions. Choosing the right person to associate with is satsang. Satsang means to be in the company of the pious, the positive, the virtuous and the truthful. It means to be in the presence of acceptance, rather than criticism and hypocrisy.

In the company of a critical and hypocritical mind, one's own mind begins to take the same shape. Associating or connecting with negative behaviour or thinking generates negativity in the form of limited and restricted attitudes, responses and perceptions. Similarly, connecting with the positive transforms the mind and the expression becomes positive. The rishis throughout the ages have stated that strength and courage must be cultivated to negate destructive and negative influences, even if this includes family members. Most people are willing to sacrifice their own peace rather than hurt someone's feelings; however, this is not in alignment with yogic thought. Each individual is responsible for their own mind, their own life, their own karma and their own dharma. Therefore, they must learn to live an appropriate life – one which is full of inner strength and inner qualities of creativity, compassion, love and service. They must cultivate a life which seeks to benefit and uplift all. This quality of life is what Swami Sivananda used to call 'the divine life'.

What is the second aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnav-achara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The second aspect of bhakti yoga is to always maintain positivity and to have a positive outlook in life. The quality of outlook that one possesses is reflected in the answer to the question: 'Is the glass half-empty or half-full?' When the answer is 'half-empty', the awareness is associated with the absence, and there is a lack of appreciation for what is there. When the answer is 'half-full', the awareness is associated with the presence and not the absence. In this manner, for everything, for every situation the advice is to always cultivate a positive outlook. To maintain that positive nature of mind is an intense and difficult thing to do. It requires great inner spiritual strength. It is the most difficult sadhana of bhakti yoga. Nonetheless, if one becomes an instrument for the Divine, if one cultivates the philosophy 'Make me an instrument of Thy will and let Thy will be done', then it becomes easy to maintain optimism and positivity in life. Alternatively, if the philosophy is 'Let my will be done and let my will predominate', then negativity will set in.

Positivity has to become the nature of the mind, not merely an experience of the mind. Actors say when they are acting it is very easy to enact the role of a bad character as it is natural. To perform the role of a good person is difficult as the mind has to be applied continuously to act in that manner. Thus, to cultivate and maintain a positive attitude, positive thoughts and positive behaviour constantly and continuously, without allowing the mind to sleep, is the second aspect of bhakti. An important aspect of positive behaviour is the presence of *sanyam*, or restraint, in speech. In speech, always cultivate constructive communication, rather than critical and negative communication.

There is a story of an astrologer who was asked by the king to read his chart. When he made the chart, this great astrologer was aghast. The king asked him, "What do you see in my chart?" The astrologer replied, "I only see death

and destruction. Your entire family, your entire clan, your entire kingdom will be wiped out. Nobody will survive.” The king became furious and threw the astrologer in jail. The astrologer’s son was also an astrologer and decided to try his luck. He came to the king and said, “Look, I am also an astrologer. Let me see your chart.” He also saw the deadly chart, however, he considered the best way to convey the news to the king. Finally, he said, “King, you have one of the best charts I have ever seen. You are going to outlive all your relatives. You are going to outlive even your kingdom.” When the king heard this he was happy, and he gave the astrologer’s son a reward. The same information was conveyed, yet one emphasized the negative and the other the positive. In the same manner, controlled speech has to develop in the deeper aspect of bhakti.

What is the third aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The third aspect of bhakti yoga is the development of humility. One becomes humble like a blade of grass which moves with the wind, rather than stiff like a tree which can break in two in a storm. Nothing can injure or hurt humility. On the other hand, arrogance can be hit, arrogance can be targeted and arrogance can be hurt. Arrogance becomes like a wall whereas humility becomes like air. When one is humble, there is total surrender and one becomes transparent.

What is the fourth aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The fourth aspect is to cultivate *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself in others. *Atmabhava* is to also see the divine and luminous nature in everything and everyone. It is to see the essence within others, rather than the physical, social, sensorial or material identity. *Atmabhava* is to have the same intensity of feeling for all as one has for one’s family.

Swami Satyananda has said many times that when someone is sick, God inside that person is sick; when

someone is happy, God inside that person is happy; when a person is distressed, hungry or thirsty, God inside that person is distressed, hungry or thirsty. When one suffers, God also suffers. This is atmabhava, the ability to see divinity in each and every one. Humility and atmabhava are qualities that have to be cultivated in bhakti yoga. However, when atmabhava develops, arrogance may also surface. The ego may become dangerous, leading one to believe one has become illuminated or enlightened, and therefore superior to everyone else.

There is a story of a sadhaka who longed for self-realization, so he went to a guru. The guru refused him initially, but as the sadhaka was pestering him relentlessly, the guru decided to give him a mantra for meditation. After a long period of meditation with his mantra, the sadhaka started to see divinity everywhere; he saw a golden orb around everyone and everything. He believed he had become enlightened. In this state of total bliss, he went to the marketplace. When he reached the market there was a stampede. He wondered what had happened. He stopped someone and asked: "What is happening? Why is everybody running away?" The person replied: "Run! Run! Mad elephant! Mad elephant!" and continued running. Intoxicated by the idea of the golden orb of the elephant, the sadhaka did not heed the wise advice. He arrogantly approached the elephant and was quickly thrown to the ground and trampled. Similarly, the guru's advice may also be ignored if the ego and arrogance arise with atmabhava, which halts spiritual progress. These ideas may sound simple, however, in order to live them one must be continuously aware of the actions, behaviours, feelings and experiences.

What is the fifth aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The fifth aspect of bhakti is remembering that God is the focus and the guru is the path leading one towards that focus. Reminding oneself this is the

direction to walk is known as remembrance. Remembrance must be constant so that one does not deviate from the path. It is a continuous reminder that keeps one connected with the aim and path. The effort in this aspect of bhakti yoga is to keep the inspiration alive by remembrance that ‘this is my direction, this is my goal, and this is my destiny’.

What is the sixth aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The sixth aspect of bhakti yoga is learning to be content from moment to moment. Contentment has to become the natural state of mind and the primary expression in life. When there is contentment, serenity also emerges. Thus, serenity and contentment go together. Without serenity, contentment is only a fleeting gust of happy, soothing air. When desires, wants and needs arise, the mind becomes distracted and begins to look outwards. However, when contentment is cultivated, the desires, aspirations and ambitions are managed in a better way. They cease to overpower the mind, the intention, the focus and the actions.

Cultivation of contentment is the antidote for influences of desires and infatuations. Contentment puts a stop to the emergence of desires that make one dance from one thing to another, without having a focus or a goal and without achieving a positive outcome or result. There is a saying in Hindi: ‘Every kind of wealth in the world – gold, money, credit card, investments and property – becomes dust when you receive the jewel of contentment’. Contentment is the highest expression of the mind denoting fullness, completeness, wholeness.

What is the seventh aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The seventh aspect of bhakti is the negation of hypocrisy in life, becoming free from all hypocrisy. Hypocrisy means putting on a mask to hide the true self, putting on the mask of falsity. Generally people

are habituated to falseness, and effort is needed to remove pretension and hypocrisy from life, to live with utmost clarity and purity.

What is the eighth aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The eighth aspect of bhakti is acceptance of everything and to not find fault or mistake in anything. When involved in some work or activity, one must endeavour to accomplish everything in the best possible manner and be as accurate as possible. To worry or get neurotic about the mistakes or shortcomings of others should cease, as this will not help the situation; one must simply focus on what needs to be done. One should avoid looking at other people and making comparisons: 'The other person has this and that, but I don't have it. The other person is being smiled at and I'm being frowned at. The other person gets a pat on the back; I'm getting slaps on my back.' These types of thoughts belittle and downgrade oneself. Self-esteem, self-image and self-awareness are diminished when such comparisons are made. This attitude also fosters hypocrisy. Therefore, the devotee should not see fault in anything and not be a hypocrite, instead he should cultivate acceptance.

What is the last aspect of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: The ninth and final aspect of bhakti yoga is absolute surrender with the attitude 'Let Thy will be done'.

What is the aim of bhakti yoga in vaishnavachara?

Swami Niranjanananda: With the total experience of this ninefold devotional path in life, all the external afflictions and sorrows cease to exist. After this, a pure, conscious state is awakened in which there is no deception or pretension. This state is directly related to absolute faith and complete surrender.

Many thinkers believe that there is no place for faith in vaishnavachara; however, to live life without faith and conviction is a vortex of struggle. If one is endowed with faith, any struggle becomes a challenge to overcome and succeed. Belief itself has two forms: faith and superstition. While faith is something internal, emerging from within, superstition is a mental idea. The dropping of superstition or mental belief is essential in vaishnavachara. Faith in oneself and in the supreme power is generated after gaining control over the fluctuations of the mind, and leads one to adopt a sattwic way of life.

Therefore, the code of conduct according to the Vaishnava tradition is to withdraw oneself from sensual and sensorial participation in the world, and to cultivate faith and conviction by following the path of devotion in order to realize the omnipresence of the divine nature. Once this realization takes place, the behaviour also changes. Just as the behaviour changes when one is being watched as compared to when one is in solitude, similarly, one behaves differently in a club than in a temple or a church. There is a difference in the appropriateness of behaviour depending on perception, location and place.

If one considers this entire world to be one temple or one big church, a sense of respect, reverence, dignity, conviction, awareness and alertness is automatically fostered in one's life. In perceiving this world as a temple of the divine power lies the opportunity to excel and become better, to experience the fullness of life and not just hanker after transitory pleasures. Naturally the mind changes and one is connected with faith. The *Kathopanishad* states (1:2:14): "Spiritual life is like walking on a razor's edge." One cannot run on that path. One can only walk slowly. If a step is missed, one will bleed. In the same manner, Swami Satyananda says, "Slow and steady wins the race." Therefore, in vaishnavachara one walks steadily and slowly on the path of bhakti yoga to gradually purify the actions, emotions and mind, paving the way to a connection with the divine spark existing within all of life's creation.

BHAKTI YOGA IN THE RAMAYANA AND RAMACHARITAMANAS

How does Sri Rama define his ninefold path of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the Aranyakanda of the *Ramacharitamanas*, (after doha 34, chau 4; doha 35; after doha 35, chau 1 to 3) *navadha bhakti*, the nine methods of bhakti as instructed by Sri Rama to Mata Shabari are described:

*Navadhaa bhagati kahau tohi paahee;
Saavadhaana sunnu dharu mana maahee.
Prathama bhagati santanha kara sangaa;
Doosari rati mama katha prasangaa. (4)*

*Gura pada pankaja sevaa teesari bhagati amaana;
Chauthi bhagati mama guna gana karai kapata taji gaana.
(35)*

*Mantra jaapa mama dridha bisvaasaa;
Panchama bhajana so beda prakaaasaa;
Chhaththa dama seela birati bahu karamaa;
Nirata nirantara sajjana dharamaa.
Saatava sama mohi maya jaga dekhaa;
Mote santa adhika kari lekhaa.
Aathava jathaalaabha santoshaa;
Sapanehu nahi dekhai paradoshaa.
Navama sarala saba sana chhalaheenaa;
Mama bharosa hiya harasha na deenaa. (1-3)*

Seeking company of saintly people; listening to the stories of the Lord; following the path shown by the guru with a humble heart; singing kirtan with a guileless heart; practising mantra japa with unwavering faith; practising self-control, virtue, and pursuing the conduct prescribed by saints; realizing God in everyone without distinction; contentment; and complete trust in God.

What are the nine modes of devotion listed in the *Rama-charitamanas*?

Swami Sivananda: Sri Rama gives the following as the nine modes of devotion when he meets Shabari, the woman of the Bhila tribe. The first is the society of realized saints. Second is the recitation of God's glories. The third is devotional service to God. The fourth is *guna-gana* or a faithful and devoted singing of His divine qualities. The fifth is japa or repetition of His name with firm faith, according to the Vedas. The sixth is strict self-discipline through the practice of perfect withdrawal of the senses and the mind from worldly activities. This is the duty of the good, in all circumstances. The seventh is the practice of perceiving the whole world in God and of regarding the saints as more venerable than God Himself. It is visualizing the macrocosm in the microcosm. The eighth is contentment and cheer in whatever one gets and never finding faults in others. The ninth is to deal without trick or fraud with one and all, to depend upon Him and to be indifferent to pleasure and pain.

Whoever practises any one of these nine, whether a man or a woman, or an animate or inanimate creature, is most dear to Him.

How does Sri Rama define bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yogic bhakti is a process of transforming the personality. The concept of yogic bhakti has been defined by Sri Rama in *Ramacharitamanas*. He speaks of bhakti to transcend the self. In this description, Sri Rama says the first method to imbibe and perfect bhakti is observing one's associations.

If one associates with good and pious people, one will also become good and pious in due course. If one associates with negative people, one will imbibe their mentality, thoughts and feelings, and also become negative and destructive. Therefore, one should seek the company of the pious in life – people who can inspire and encourage, who

are virtuous and do not commit any wrong. That is the first condition that Sri Rama describes to Shabari for perfection of bhakti yoga: *Prathama bhagati santana kara sanga* – associate with the pious to become pious in heart, thought and deed.

The second point that Sri Rama makes is: *Dusari rati mama katha prasanga* – “The second step is love for my stories.” People while away their time in unnecessary and idle gossip, discussion and debate, only to prove their supremacy: “I am right and you are wrong.” Criticism, gossip and unnecessary chatter are worthless for they do not provide any inspiration; they do not provide any indication of the methods to sublimate one’s energies. Therefore, devotees should spend time thinking, reading, discussing, analyzing and experiencing the existence of the divine spirit. Instead of novels, they should read scriptures. Novels are mere mental entertainment, yet if they read a worthwhile book, they will derive inspiration and education which will help them progress in life.

When people read about the nature and quality of God, the Self, the universe and the world, they can cultivate an awareness of where to stand in life. Life has been given to them as a process of evolution, and they have to help that process take place. Life has not been given to be wasted in petty gossip, jealousies, hatred and anger. There is a definite purpose of life which has to be lived and realized. Therefore, people should reflect on and study the literature that can give an insight into their own nature, the nature of the world and the higher self. This is the second aspect of bhakti in yoga.

Sri Rama’s third step in bhakti yoga or emotional management is becoming humble and egoless. Becoming completely egoless is not possible, yet one can at least become free from one’s arrogance and inner rigidity. Arrogance means that one is rigid inside, that there is no flexibility within. Becoming flexible internally and reducing the intensity of the arrogance, *dambha* and *abhimana*, leads to humility.

Sri Swami Satyananda used to teach me many things in a natural and spontaneous way. He would tell me, “Even if you think you know, and even if you are capable of doing something perfectly and properly, always think that you do not know, so that every action of yours holds your full awareness.” If one thinks that one knows, then one’s awareness is separate from the action. When awareness separates from action and action stands alone, arrogance surfaces in the form of, “I can do it.” One identifies with the expressions, “Who are you to tell me anything? I know better than you.” That is the beginning of arrogance. Sri Swamiji used to tell me, “Even though you may be an expert in anything and everything, always think in your mind that you are only a novice.” I have followed that instruction of my guru. Humility, by adhering to the instructions and guidance of the master or the teacher, should be cultivated. When one becomes humble, the negative expressions of the heart disappear and the positive expressions manifest. Envy, greed and jealousy disappear; love, compassion, sympathy and affection replace them.

From this perspective, the yogic concept of bhakti yoga is actually psychological development and upliftment of the individual. It fine-tunes one’s nature to improve the quality of the heart expressions. The faculties of the heart are cultivated by following the yogic path of bhakti yoga as defined by Sri Rama. Once one has established oneself in this path, then emotions are channelled and redirected towards the discovery of the inner self. When the inner self is discovered, there is realization that it is a reflection of the transcendental self. That is the culmination of bhakti.

The first step is analyzing one’s associations – the people, family and friends with whom one interacts. One has to ask oneself what kind of discussions and conversations one has with them, what kind of interactions one has with them. One may discover that those associations are not really helping to uplift one. Rather, they are making one more involved and engrossed in the material dimension. If this be the case, one

has to separate or distance oneself from those restrictive and negative associations.

What is the first bhakti yoga sadhana given by Sri Rama?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Rama's first instruction to Mata Shabari is: *Prathama bhagati santanha kara sanga* – "Associating with saintly people is the first kind of bhakti." Who are saintly people? *Santa hridaya navanita samana* – "Those whose hearts are as tender as freshly churned butter." One whose heart is hard as stone is not a saintly person. One who lacks a sensitive heart, who does not care about anyone and instead troubles others, cannot be a saintly person. A hard-hearted person can never be of any use to anyone, for such a person always remains engrossed in self-centred activities.

Only a tender-hearted person whose pranas have become soft is called a *satpurusha*, a good person. A sadhu's heart should be as soft as butter. One who is soft and tender is full of sattwic qualities. The stream of love, compassion, trust and faith has started flowing in his life. Such a person never says a harsh word to anyone, does not think ill of anyone, does not wish ill to anyone, and does not waste time in praise and criticism. Such a person always remains peaceful and follows the path of truth. One who walks the path of truth is called a *bhakti sadhaka*.

The first sadhana of bhakti yoga is to walk the path of truth. It is through the company of truth that one imbibes truth in life. However, nothing happens merely by spending time with saints and sages and hearing their wisdom if one does not imbibe and practise that wisdom in one's life. It is essential to internalize the teachings. Only then is the first sadhana of bhakti realized and actualized.

What is the importance of listening to stories of the Divine?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Dusari rati mama katha prasanga*. This is the second sadhana of navadha bhakti: listening to the stories of God. The narrations in texts such as the *Srimad*

Bhagavatam are not just stories; they are teachings that are useful in life. Every story in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* has teachings of wisdom, justice, dharma, law, truth, beauty and virtue. When one listens to the stories, one also imbibes the teachings. People usually listen to stories for entertainment. They do not contemplate how they can adopt the lessons inherent in the stories in their lives. ‘How can I become more patient? How can I enhance my faith? How can I improve my restraint?’ When one internalizes these things to the extent that they become a part of one’s inner being, the second sadhana of bhakti yoga will manifest in one’s life.

In India during the 1960s and 1970s, if a boy was seen with an English novel he was considered to be educated and with a modern bent of mind, and if someone was seen carrying the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Ramayana*, he was called old-fashioned. Such a state of society negates the second method of bhakti: *Rati mama katha prasanga*. The mind will become tamasic by reading novels. What teaching will one receive from a novel? What kind of samskaras will one imbibe? When one reads the scriptures or other literature containing truth and wisdom, those teachings and samskaras will uplift and improve one’s life.

What is the real meaning of padasevam?

Swami Niranjanananda: The third sadhana is: *Guru pada pankaja seva*. Generally people interpret this to mean ‘to serve at the guru’s feet’. This is a dangerous interpretation. Once there was a guru who had two disciples. One afternoon, while the guru was resting, the disciples came to his kutir. Each disciple took one of the guru’s legs and said, “This leg is mine, the other one is yours. You don’t touch my leg and I will not touch yours.” Both disciples started to massage the guru’s legs. By mistake one of them touched the guru’s other leg. The second disciple was furious: “How dare you touch my leg?” In retaliation, he touched the other leg. The first disciple was now annoyed that this fellow had touched the leg that was his share. He slapped the guru’s other leg.

The second disciple gave two slaps back. Now the guru was caught between the two disciples and his legs were being repeatedly slapped, while the disciples were fighting among themselves.

This is not the way to serve the guru. *Guru pada pankaja seva tisari bhagati amana* means something else altogether. One should follow the path shown by the guru with a humble heart, filled with the faith that one will benefit by walking this path. Infused with faith and trust, one gives up arrogance, and keeps developing and progressing according to the instructions of the guru. This is the third kind of bhakti.

Why does Sri Rama recommend kirtan as a sadhana of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Chauthi bhagati mama guna gana karai kapata taji gana. Fourth, without deceit or expectation, without self-centredness, one remembers always the names of the Divine, sings them, sings kirtan. People memorize film songs easily and sing them happily, yet if asked to sing the names of God they become agitated and say, “Oh no, I can’t do that sort of thing.” They start talking in terms of secularism and religiosity. A film song is considered secular and the name of God is considered non-secular. A philosophy or a way of thinking may be seen from the point of view of secularism and non-secularism. However, bhakti is about the individual’s relationship with the Divine.

*Ishwara Allah Wahe Guru, chahe kaho Sri Rama,
Malika sabaka eka hai, alaga-alaga hai nama.*

Call him Ishwara, Allah, Wahe Guru or Sri Rama,
There is only one Lord of all beings, different merely
are the names.

This is the experience: leaving aside guile and deception and letting the mind flow in the contemplation, remembrance and kirtan of the Divine.

What is the role of mantra?

Swami Niranjanananda: Mantra japa mama dridha biswasa, panchama bhajana so beda prakasa. The fifth sadhana is the japa of mantra and the teaching of the scriptures. Yoga says that mantra is a force that can free the mind from the bindings of desire and craving, and make it peaceful. *Mananat trayate iti mantrah* – “Mantra is that energy which liberates the mind from bondage.” The bondage of the mind is desire and craving. What one thinks, what one wants and craves, what one wishes to attain, is the bondage of the mind. If one wants something, first one begins to think about it and slowly the thinking changes to worry. When the mind is caught up in worry and anxiety, inner clarity is lost. Worry ties the mind to one subject, one thing, one line of thought. It does not allow the mind to be free. Mantra liberates the mind. If one can do japa with a worry-free, peaceful mind, that is a state of bhakti.

What is meant by humanness?

Swami Niranjanananda: Chhatha dama seela birati bahu karama, nirata nirantara sajjana dharama. The sixth sadhana of bhakti is constant effort at endurance, goodness, *vairagya* or non-attachment, and graciousness. The main attribute is *sajjanata*, decency, goodness, humanness or graciousness. There are two principles in human beings: bruteness and humanness. More often, it is the animalistic nature that manifests in the form of lust, anger, hostility, aversion, greed, arrogance and envy. However, when humanness manifests in life, there is gentleness and softness. The sign of refinement is not being learned; it is non-aggression. The sign of decency is not volatility but peacefulness. Therefore, one has to adopt and uphold the code of decency, humanness and goodness. Cultivate a character that can help one progress in life from the negative, destructive ego of *tamas* to the luminosity, balance, peace and purity of *sattwa*.

Why is it important to see God in everyone?

Swami Niranjanananda: Satavan sama mohi maya jaga dekha, moten santa adhika kari lekha. Seventh, one must realize the omnipresence of God. One should experience God in everyone and the ego should not interfere in this experience of God. The ego is difficult to overcome and destroy. Attainments make it bigger, causing a downfall of the aspirant. That is why one who simply tries to see the presence of God in everyone is called a *bhakta*.

What is meant by santosha?

Swami Niranjanananda: Athavan jathalabha santosha, sapanehun nahin dekhai paradosha. The eighth sadhana of bhakti instructs one to be content and to refrain from finding fault. *Santosha* means to experience satisfaction and contentment in life. One accepts what one has as *prasad* or God's gift and does not hanker after what one does not have. One does not see shortcomings. When one sees the whole world as a manifestation of the Supreme Spirit, how can one see fault in it? There will be a shortcoming only where there is no God. The verse first says, "See only My form everywhere," and then it says, "Do not see the shortcomings." This reflects the beautiful quality of the psychology of bhakti.

What is the last sadhana of Sri Rama's bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Navama sarala saba sana chhalahina, mama bharosa hiyan harasha na dina – "The ninth sadhana of bhakti is to be free of cunning, to be simple, to trust in God and avoid extreme high or low spirits." This is the last sadhana of navadha bhakti. To say it in two words, this is *Ishwara pranidhana*, cultivation of trust in the supreme, non-decaying reality and dedication of one's will and action to that. In the state of *Ishwara pranidhana*, there is complete trust and faith, as this trust is not dependent on some external object; it is dependent on one's own self. After experiencing the Godhood in creation, after experiencing the element of God within oneself, only trust remains. This

is the last stage of bhakti where one is overflowing with trust. When one has jumped into the ocean and become totally drenched, there is no fear of getting wet.

Why are there so many stages in the bhakti path of yoga, and how are they defined?

Swami Niranjanananda: The aim of bhakti yoga is to identify with the pure nature of emotions, love and spirit. The process is through kirtan, mantra, adoration, contemplation, prayer and so forth. However, these transformations have to take place in an area of one's personality that has not yet been mapped or charted. So, there are nine stages to bhakti yoga and one should be able to attain each stage, experience it and live it. These are the nine stages:

1. Encounter with truth
2. Identification with the godly qualities
3. Adherence to the teachings
4. Acceptance of reality
5. Remembrance of God with faith through mantra
6. Restraint and graceful action
7. Seeing divinity in everything
8. Contentment
9. Let Thy will be done.



2

Encounter With Truth

The first form of bhakti yoga is encounter with the inherent truth. Although that statement sounds simple, what does it really mean? People all wear different kinds of masks which they put on for self-identity. Each mask projects them as a particular type of person at different times, hiding their true nature. The discovery of truth is learning to live without a mask so one can discover who one is, what one's real nature is, after dropping the masks. This is the first attainment of bhakti yoga.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

IMPORTANCE OF SATSANG AND SHRAVANA

How does the journey of bhakti yoga begin?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first meaning of bhakti is 'to separate oneself'. To separate oneself from the world and connect with the inner nature is the aim of bhakti yoga. Separation from the world takes place by becoming aware of one's associations, *sambandh*, and connection with the inner spirit takes place when one cultivates *atmabhava*, seeing oneself in everyone. According to Sri Swami Satyananda, this is the pathway of bhakti yoga. The final attainment is *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself, one's own nature, one's own spirit in everything. This journey begins with defining one's associations.

The first station where one gets on the train of bhakti yoga is called *satsanga*, association with that which is real, eternal and truthful. Ultimately the train will take the devotee to atmabhava, the ability to see one's own spirit in everyone.

Why is satsang a boon for all?

Swami Sivananda: Satsang is association or keeping company with good people, with sages, yogis and devotees, and hearing their spiritual instructions. Being in the company of sages and saints will heal one's sorrows, infuse new life and show the way to peace and happiness. The magnetic aura, the spiritual vibration and the powerful currents of adepts produce a tremendous influence on the mind.

Satsang is the sun that dispels the cloud of ignorance. Only a strong soul can keep itself glowing in isolation. One can take the opportunity to strengthen one's aspirations by communion with others who share them. Satsang with a sage for even one minute is much better than rulership of a kingdom. It leads to the right path and causes the sun of wisdom to shine upon one's mind. One should try one's best never to miss satsang. There is nothing as inspiring, elevating and full of solace.

What is satsang?

Swami Satyananda: The Sanskrit root *sat* means 'reality, divinity, truth, spirit and purity'; it represents the Self or God. *Sang* means 'coming together'. Satsang does not mean being in the company of many people; that is known as *sangha*, which means 'company or association'. Satsang is being in the company of truth.

Satsang is association, congregation, conference, meeting with the people who discuss and talk about topics pertaining to spiritual life, not politics, sociology, finances, romance, weather, fashion or food, but spiritual life. Satsang is important. Someone must tell the stories of those great saints who had the vision of the supreme.

Longfellow, the poet, said that one has to read the lives of the great saints to make one's own life sublime. Throughout history, saints have led a unique type of life. They have experimented with a new system of life, a new conduct, a new way of thinking. They were revolutionaries of their time. I have read practically all of them, the Hindu saints, the Christian saints, the Sufi saints, the Muslim saints, the Hebrew saints and the Greek saints. If one reads their lives, they will inspire. Their inspiration will awaken bhakti. This is how one has to plod on with our spiritual consciousness.

Satsang is the essence of yogic and spiritual life. Satsang is an encounter with truth or association with those who are following the path of truth. In the highest sense it means direct perception and communion with truth, and even more: living with awareness of truth in every action and incident of life. It means that one's being is submerged in awareness of truth. This is an elevated definition. At a more practical level, satsang means sitting in the company of wise men and women and listening to what they have to say. Satsang also means a place where seekers of truth meet in the presence of their guru.

The second definition of satsang is to keep company with good literature: the Vedas, Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Bible, Koran, Torah and many other scriptures. There is the literature of Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda and others. There are hundreds and thousands of such books. One should make it a point to dive deep into such literature.

The third definition of satsang is keeping company with saints, sages, mahatmas and wise men who do not have any obligation to a sect, but are universal in nature and philosophy.

When one has satsang one will be transformed. It is not necessary to be a good person in order to have satsang. One may be a wretched person, an incarnation or a symbol of evil, it doesn't matter. Through satsang a transformation definitely takes place. The importance of satsang is that even

the most unholy, most untouchable being becomes worthy of respect, worship and honour.

What does ‘being in the company of truth’ mean?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first form of bhakti is *satsang*, being in the company of truth. Being in the company of truth can be translated in various ways. Being near a saintly person and having their satsang, instruction and guidance can be one form of bhakti. Another form of the same bhakti can be taken as analyzing the truth and spiritual life; but whatever the state, the main emphasis is being in the company of truth.

If this is defined psychologically, then truth represents a quality which is gained after attaining discernment. If there is no discernment, there can be no discovery of truth. In order to experience truth one needs to have the power, the force of discrimination. How can one attain this?

A sadhana is required, whether that sadhana is being in the company of a person who is enlightened, absorbing his or her vibrations and allowing the inner mind to experience it, or whether that sadhana is self-analysis, trying to develop the faculty of discernment through a meditative process or way of life. According to their level of life and consciousness, everyone has to give their own definition to satsang, or being in the company of truth.

How can one understand satsang?

Swami Satyananda: Satsang is a combination of two ideas. *Sang* means ‘association’ and *sat* means ‘reality or truth’. Whenever one is attuned to the reality or the truth within oneself or outside, that is known as satsang. In fact, satsang is not necessarily a session of questions and answers. Within oneself there are the lower and higher self – the two personalities. The lower self is ignorant and the higher self is full of knowledge. When the conversation takes place within oneself between the lower and the higher self, that is in fact satsang.

It is not possible for everybody to invoke the higher self. Most people are on that level where they have a self filled with conflicts, confusions and ignorance. Therefore, at that time they need an external personality to represent their higher self. Knowledge can be acquired by two known ways. One is known as tuition, the other is known as intuition. In tuition an external personality represents the higher self, and with intuition the higher self is awakened and one receives an answer through it.

As such, everybody, anybody who can answer questions is not considered qualified for satsang. Whether it is one's higher self which one has evolved and raised or whether it is a person outside of oneself, in any case that person should represent the higher consciousness. Merely attending to satsang through intellect is not enough; one has to have some sort of communion with one's higher self. The higher self is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. That alone can give the proper answer. Therefore, every sannyasin cannot conduct satsang, but if he has evoked his higher self, if he has raised his higher self, surely he can.

In what way is satsang a relationship?

Swami Niranjanananda: In Tulsidas' *Ramacharitamanas*, Sri Rama tells Shabari: *Prathama bhagati santana kara sanga* – "The first aspect of bhakti is the company of saints." The normal interpretation of this is to be in the presence of saints, sadhus, sannyasins or elevated souls. Whatever is spoken in their company is considered to be *satsang* or spiritual truth. However, people have limited this idea to mere talk. One needs to go to the root of the subject.

Who is a saint? In the *Ramacharitamanas*, Sri Rama says, *Santa hridaya navaneet samana* – "The heart of a saint is as soft as butter." Take the example of a potato. When the potato is uncooked it is not tasty, for it is hard. When the same potato is boiled, it becomes soft, edible and tasty. Likewise, when the heart becomes soft, the sentiments and emotions become soft and pure, and a person becomes saintly. Swami

Satyananda would explain the same idea in many ways – how by purifying one’s sentiments one can experience the divinity within.

Essentially, the *sanga* or company of saints conveys the idea of a relationship. The modern individual is motivated by relationships. One establishes relationships with one’s family, friends and other people. These relationships then influence one’s attitudes, thoughts and behaviour. If there is negativity in there, it becomes so strong that it pollutes even the good. If one fruit becomes rotten in a basket of fruit, it spoils the others. However, several good fruits cannot purify the rotten one. Likewise, the tamasic forces in one’s life are so strong that they destroy and negate the virtues.

If one is surrounded by people whose behaviour, thoughts and life are not saintly or sattvic then the behaviour, attitude and actions are also influenced by their nature. Thus, one should be in the company of sattvic persons, not tamasic persons. Good company is the beginning of bhakti, as this exposes the aspirants to fresh, positive, creative and inspiring thoughts, which give them a new direction in life.

What are the guidelines on association given by Sage Patanjali?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Yoga Sutras* Sage Patanjali puts down the rules of association (1:33):

*Maitreekarunaamuditopekshaanaam
sukhaduhkhapunyaapunyavishayaanaam
bhaavanaatashchitta-prasaadanam.*

In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitude of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful.

This statement is an indication that one’s associations should be appropriate. Be friendly with those who are

happy and their happiness will come to you, you will share in that happiness. Don't be friendly with those who are unhappy because their unhappiness will come to you. Be compassionate for those who are suffering, whether mentally or physically, externally or internally. Be happy for those who are virtuous in life and associate with them. Ignore the negative, crooked and destructive. Don't have anything to do with them.

Objectively one should analyze oneself and the people with whom one associates, then decide who are those who have a positive influence in one's life and who are those who have no relevance in one's life. Who are those who inspire to discover a new and positive perspective? Who are those who entice to become more involved and engrossed in the material dimension? The thinkers have gone to the extent of saying that one's association has to be so appropriate that one has to be ready to shun even one's partner if he or she is not assisting in achieving the goal.

In this way, bhakti yoga becomes the method of attaining purity of emotions, beginning with identifying one's associations.

What is the origin of satsang?

Swami Satyananda: Satsang is not a new thing. It has existed throughout the world since time immemorial. At the dawn of history, primitive tribes and village communities always had a wise man, shaman or medicine man. They were respected people whose views were sought by others. They gave satsang.

Satsang was practised in ancient Greece. Many of the books by Plato and other great sages are based on talks given during satsang. The Greek sages were called philosophers, which means 'lovers of the truth'.

The difference between rhetoric and sophism is clearly described in the Greek classic called *The Phaedrus*, which is based on satsang given by Socrates and written down by Plato. Socrates is one example of a great sage who used to give talks

based on knowledge of the truth. He used to give satsang to his many disciples and to many others who cared to listen. Plato was the chronicler of his master's enlightened satsang.

Christ gave satsang to multitudes of people the length and breadth of Galilee. He transformed the lives of many people, converting them. Many examples are given in the Bible. The greatest recorded satsang of Christ is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapters 5 to 7). Buddha gave satsang for almost fifty years in every place he went to. The Buddhist scriptures are full of the recorded words of Buddha. All religions of the world are based on satsang – words of the wise. Every mystical system is based on satsang and every scripture is nothing but recorded satsang.

In what way can satsang become an inspiration?

Swami Niranjanananda: Satsang means to be in the company of truth, in the company of good people. A discourse or discussion is not called satsang. Many people give discourses and answer questions, but that is not called satsang. Satsang means an inspiration which one receives and maintains within. When one encounters a sage, and he looks with his benevolent, peaceful and compassionate eyes, that look is also satsang. With that look, something changes in one's mind, something changes within; one identifies with a positive quality. Whether it is positivity, compassion or love that one finds in that look, one can say, "Just the look transformed me" or "What a beautiful feeling it was when he looked at me." This means that something inspired an energy arousal within which gave happiness. Therefore, no matter what one's mood is, one should smile at everybody every morning and say, "Good Morning."

What harm is there if one looks at someone, smiles and says, "Good morning"? It creates a positive feeling. A happy look and a happy smile can create a positive feeling, more so than a frowning look and face. Even that is satsang – sharing of one's happiness, optimism and contentment with everybody, uplifting each one as one goes through the day.

Satsang is sharing of happiness, wisdom, love and compassion. Satsang is sharing the light and not spreading the darkness. This should be understood properly. A positive, appropriate communication, which can motivate and inspire a person to be more active, optimistic and positive, is called satsang. Whether it is a sentence, a lecture, an answer to a question, a simple glance or simply being in the presence of an enlightened master, satsang transforms the inner nature.

Satsang removes the depressions of the heart and brings joy in the emotions. It removes confusion of mind and gives a sense of hope in the place of hopelessness. It allows one to express the better part of oneself. People always love and appreciate that better part. What people don't like or appreciate is the negative part. Nobody likes one's negative side, yet everybody loves one's happy, positive side. Thus, satsang is a tool to remain contented, happy and joyous. Just a simple smile means 'welcome' to everyone.

How important is it for a bhakta to avoid bad company?

Swami Satyananda: One has to be careful about the company and associations one keeps, the people with whom one lives, because they have an influence. Satsang is the company of good people. Kusang is the company of evil people. If one associates with evil people, the mind, the family, prosperity and ultimately the whole country will be destroyed. History bears evidence of such events where people cared more for evil or negative suggestions.

In one's personal life, one should reflect on whether the people one is dealing with are of a positive nature. Are they people with divine, serene minds or are they malicious and evil? The choice is entirely one's own and on that choice depends one's destiny. Destiny and karma are both the same. Destiny is created by karma and karma is created by satsang and kusang, good associations and bad. To illustrate this there is a beautiful and important episode in which Sri Rama, who had been chosen for coronation as emperor, was instead exiled by his father.

It had been decided that Sri Rama, the heir apparent, would ascend the throne of Ayodhya to become the emperor of the subcontinent of South Asia. Then the order came for his exile for fourteen years. This young man of eighteen was the darling of his father and was loved by the king's beautiful third queen. She loved Rama very much but due to the bad company she kept, her mind changed. Queen Kaikeyi became the villain of this game, although she was such a good-natured lady. The *Ramayana* says that she loved Rama more than his mother Kaushalya did. Why did she change overnight? Not because she was bad, but because she kept bad company.

Therefore, one should live carefully. It is not enough to be good; it is also necessary that one's company be good. If one takes a kilo of milk and puts just one drop of lemon into it, what happens? Just one drop of lemon destroys the milk. Similarly, an evil companion, an evil suggestion will destroy one's whole life, family, everything. The effect of good company is just the reverse. Even if a person is hopeless, bad and evil, if he moves with good company, everybody will respect him.

Who is more crooked, more of a rascal than me? Today everybody worships me because I kept the company of sadhus and mahatmas. I did not choose a film star as my idol, I chose Swami Sivananda to be the hero of my life. I am his fan, not the fan of a film star, a politician, a rich man or a beautiful lady. I am the fan of Swami Sivananda, therefore, I kept good company all the time. I read the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Anandamayi Ma and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I kept company with good books, with good men, with good food and with everything which is good. Therefore, this bad man is considered to be a good man. So if you are a bad man, please keep the company of good people and if you are a good man, please be careful of bad people. There is a saying:

*Jaake priya na Raam-vaidehee
Tajiya taahi koti vairee sama yadyapi parama samahee.*

This means that even if the bad influence is your own husband, wife, child or friend, whosoever he may be, although you may love him very much, renounce him, leave him, reject him, dismiss him. Throw him out of your life and you will be safe. Or would you prefer to keep a cobra in your pocket?

What is the purpose of positive associations?

Swami Niranjanananda: Satsang is the first component of the ninefold path of bhakti. In this path there is a transformation of what one feels and knows, an expansion of the horizons of perception. As one's perceptions develop, one begins to connect with other people. Satsang is being in the company of, or in association with truth, with good people who uplift and encourage. *Sat* means truth, reality, that which really exists, and *sanga* means association with. Satsang is association with what is true and real. What is true and real, apart from the senses, mind, desires and expectations? What is the truth beyond the material dimension? The concept of truth and reality begins with modification or fine-tuning of buddhi.

People create associations through *buddhi* or intellect. Associations determine how they are going to live their life. If they associate with good people, they will receive good samskaras, good thoughts, inspiration and motivation. If they associate with the wrong people, they will receive wrong samskaras, wrong ideas and thoughts. Buddhi is under the influence of tamas. Therefore, although they are searching for happiness, their association with tamasic buddhi does not allow contentment. Yoga says to choose the right association which uplifts and makes one happy and contented.

The world has been seen as unreal, transient, changing all the time. Nothing remains constant. Those one considers to be one's own are not. The husband, wife, friend relationship is only a social relationship. Nobody dies together.

People are all individual beings, fulfilling and living their destiny without knowing what that destiny is. They simply live, believing that if they live in this manner, they will be happy and that if they live in another manner, they will be unhappy. Happiness and unhappiness are the only two criteria of life, but it is not destiny.

What is destined for human beings is to know that they are united. The feeling of union only happens when one is able to project one's spirit outwards and see oneself in others, which Sri Swami Satyananda calls *atmabhava*. A mother feels for her child because there is a connection between her and the child, and therefore there is identification. Atmabhava is seeing oneself, not only in one's child, but in other children – seeing one's spirit in everyone.

Atmabhava is being able to see divinity, to see one's own spirit, in each and every one. Spirit is divine. Spirit is God, which in its ultimate form contains the aspects of satyam, shivam and sundaram. Atmabhava, being able to see oneself in others, is the point of transformation. It removes one from selfish attitudes to selfless expression. Without atmabhava, one becomes selfish, but with atmabhava one becomes selfless. Your suffering becomes mine and my suffering becomes yours. Your happiness becomes mine and my happiness becomes yours.

In a selfless environment I feel what you feel and you feel what I feel. This is the conversion of buddhi. Association leads to the conversion of buddhi. Therefore, one needs to choose the right association. It should be an ideal association. My hero is my guru. Sri Swamiji's hero is his guru, Swami Sivananda. This identification represents an association. If my hero and my ideal is a bad person, then what I receive from that association will be bad.

How does one cultivate positive associations?

Swami Niranjanananda: Realizing one's associations and connections is foremost. Is the association positive, truthful and uplifting? Is it destructive, detrimental and depressive?

From the yogic perspective, one needs to associate with people who can inspire and encourage one to face life with dignity and help to follow a system by which one can realize the beauty life has to offer. A positive association cultivates a positive mind. When one is surrounded by good people, one feels good and when one is surrounded by negative people, one's thoughts, expressions and attitudes become negative.

One rotten apple can ruin the entire bucket, but a hundred good apples cannot improve the quality of one bad apple. That is the power of negativity and conditioning. If one is able to remove a rotten influence or association from one's life, one is on the path of wellbeing, but if one cannot, there is no use thinking about wellbeing. There is no middle path, no adjustment. Either something is rotten or fresh and pure. Therefore, spiritual disciplines require constant awareness of influences, people, situations and conditions where one is restricted, and of places, situations and conditions where one is able to express oneself and grow.

Due to mental conditioning it is easier to associate with the negative and destructive. Children are easily influenced by their friends due to association. They cannot relate to their parents properly and fear them due to association. Sitting the child on one's lap twenty times a day is not association, for when the time comes, that child will hide his real intentions. Behind the parent's back everything is happening with their friends. Many parents are the judge, jury and executioner and have lost the ability to associate in a friendly manner with other people and their own children.

One should look at one's interactions and participation in society. People do not know their next door neighbours. They live in an isolated world. It is a trend that is evolving and becoming stronger. The quest for material happiness isolates individuals. The quest for spiritual experiences unites people. There has to be a balance between the material and the spiritual. People should not negate one because of the other. They should bring them together and start yoga by defining their associations.

How does satsang help develop shravana bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: One cannot attain shravana bhakti without *satsang*, being in the company of saints or the wise. Mere reading for oneself can only give a partial experience. Doubts will come up, and they cannot be resolved by oneself. An experienced worshipper is necessary to instruct the devotee on the right path. Shankaracharya says, “The company of the wise, even for a moment, becomes the boat to cross the ocean of *samsara*, the illusory world.” Without *satsang*, *sadhana* or spiritual practice does not become perfect and strong. The fort of *sadhana* should be built on the foundation of *satsang*.

Mere austerities are not the end of *sadhana*. *Satsang* illumines the devotee and removes his impurities. It is only then that subtle truths are grasped. Sri Krishna says to Uddhava that nothing but *satsang* can put an end to worldly attachments. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it is said that the best dharma in this world is to hear God’s glories, for thereby one attains the divine abode. King Parikshit attained liberation through *shravana*, listening to stories of the divine, and *satsang*. He heard about the glories of God from Maharishi Suka and his heart was purified. He became liberated and attained the abode of Vishnu at Vaikuntha. He enjoyed supreme bliss.

The mind cannot but remember divine things when it is in the company of divine people. Therefore one should have *satsang* and should always live with a saint or a great bhakta. The aspirant should not be perturbed by censure or ridicule from the world. He should rely on God and rest assured that God will help him in all troubles and give him final emancipation.

How essential is it for a bhakta to attend satsang?

Swami Sivananda: It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutras 39 to 42):

*Mahatsangastu durlabho’gamyo’moghashcha.
Labhyate’pitatkripayaiva.*

Tasminstajjane bhedaabhaavaat.

Tadeva saadhyataam tadeva saadhyataam.

The company of the great souls is again difficult of attainment, is unapproachable and is infallible or unfailing in its effect.

Because it is obtained by the grace of God alone.

There is no difference between God and His devotees.

Let that alone be practised, let that alone be practised.

(39–42)

The effect of saintly contact is unerring and infallible. In ordinary aspirants the transformation may be slow and gradual. The devotee dwells in the heart of God and God dwells in the heart of the devotees. When the individual soul surrenders himself to God, he comes entirely under the influence and protection of God.

When the impurities of the mind are removed, the devotee recognizes that there is no difference between him and the Divine. Then the divine grace descends. The grace may appear as the guru. The grace may come in the form of concentration, serenity, devotion, or the vision of God. Just as the river loses its name and form after it has entered the ocean, so also a devotee loses his individuality when he merges himself in the Divine. The mind that causes distinction is annihilated by devotion.

Sutra 42 says, ‘Strive after love of God alone, strive after love of God alone’. The object of repeating the phrase is to stress its urgency and importance. If you wish to cultivate divine love, sincerely long for the company of saints.

How does Sage Narada warn against keeping company with the wicked?

Swami Sivananda: Everywhere, at all times, by all means avoid the company of the wicked. Evil company is the main obstacle to devotion. Evil company destroys all virtues such as purity, truthfulness and compassion. A sage alone is above

good and evil. He alone will not be affected by evil. It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutras 43 to 45):

Dussangah sarvathaiva tyajyah.

Kaamakrodhamoha-smritibhramsha-buddhinaasha-sarvanaashaakaaranatvaat.

Tarangaayitaa apeeme sangaatsamudraayanti.

Evil company should be certainly given up by all means. Because it is the cause of passion, anger, delusion, loss of memory, loss of intellect and total ruin.

Though they (these evil tendencies) rise only in the form of ripples in the beginning, they become like an ocean as a result of evil company. (43–45)

The opposite of evil company, *dussanga*, is *satsanga*. Loss of memory is forgetfulness of the truth and forgetfulness of one's object in life as well as one's duty. *Buddhinasa* or loss of discrimination refers to the inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, the permanent and the impermanent, good and bad, right and wrong.

An aspirant should be afraid of even faint traces of negativity until they are totally eradicated. Just as fire under the ashes may assume the form of a huge flame by the blowing of a strong wind, so also suppressed evil may assume a huge form through negative company. Therefore, the aspirant should be ever vigilant and avoid negative company ruthlessly. It is also said in the Bible (Proverbs 22:24 to 25):

Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

How does satsang help to develop strength of mind?

Swami Satyananda: The mind is not weak. The mind is weak when it does not like or is uninterested in something. The mind of man is not weak, no individual is inherently weak. If he is wavering, it is because he does not have the taste for

it. Is anyone weak when it concerns desire, anger, greed, hostility, unawareness and ignorance? Yet, when it comes to the path of knowledge, man is weak. One can sit for ten hours and watch a TV program, but after half an hour the mala falls from the hand and one says, “Swamiji, my mind is very weak. After half an hour of doing japa I cannot do any more.”

The mind is not weak; it is the interest that is weak. To become human the first thing required is satsang. Only that, nothing else. Satsang is an injection. It feeds the mind. Only one on whom God is bestowing grace receives satsang. It is said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Balakanda, after doha 2, chau 4):

*Binu satasanga bibeka na hoee,
Raama kripaa binu sulabha na soee.
Satasangata muda mangala moolaa,
Soi phala siddhi saba saadhana phoolaa.*

Wisdom does not dawn without association with saints, and such association cannot be had without the grace of Sri Rama;

Contact with noble souls is the root of joy and blessings; it constitutes the very fruit and fulfilment of all endeavours, whereas all other practices are blossoms as it were.

Sang means ‘association’, *sat* means ‘good’, therefore *satsang* means associating with a good thing. *Kusang* means associating with a bad thing. With satsang comes the discrimination that helps one to know, “I am not weak but strong. It is only the tamoguna in me that makes me think that I am weak. Otherwise, I am strong.”

Satsang generates self-confidence in a person. Thousands of parts are needed to produce a small aircraft. Such hard work is needed. Similarly, to attain God much hard work is needed. One lifetime is not enough. It is not possible to graduate in just one year. Similarly, for a man to attain God, which is the ultimate aim of life, is very difficult in one

lifetime. To attain God is the ultimate aim, the last challenge. This is not a whirlwind courtship where one does pooja today and tomorrow there is the vision of God.

Forget about Mirabai, you and I are not Mirabai! Neither are we Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. We are ordinary human beings. We should stick to the rules of japa and tapas so that one day we will attain the aim of life.

How should one approach satsang?

Swami Satyananda: If one feels cold in the affairs of life it is alright, but in satsang one must throw oneself open. One can express oneself like an innocent child. It doesn't matter what others will think, for if the people who come to satsang cannot understand the consequences of emotions, they are only joining the satsang intellectually.

What should be one's attitude when attending satsang?

Swami Niranjanananda: Satsang is a medium of inspiration. The person giving satsang does it to establish a connection between the listener and his higher self. He uses the teachings from the spiritual texts along with his personal experiences to inspire. The lessons of satsang, the teachings and the inspiration received in satsang, should always be incorporated into one's life.

There is a story about three identical statues that were brought one morning to the court of the great king Vikramaditya by a sculptor. The sculptor asked the king to identify the statues according to quality: the best quality, the medium quality and the lowest quality. Vikramaditya was a wise king. He took a piece of straw in his hand and put it through the ear of each statue. In the first statue the straw went into its stomach; in the second statue it came out of its mouth; and in the third statue it came out the other ear. Vikramaditya declared the first statue to be the best, since it represented a person who takes in, digests and tries to incorporate in his life whatever he hears. The second was of medium quality, as it represented a person who talks about,

comments on and gives his own interpretation to whatever he hears. The last statue was of the lowest quality, as it represented a person for whom whatever is heard goes in one ear and out the other.

When listening to satsang one should try to find in it one thought, one behaviour, one action that can be incorporated into one's life. Only then does the teaching become fruitful; otherwise, it all goes in one ear and out the other.

When practising keeping good company, how does one disassociate from family members?

Swami Niranjanananda: One should not incorporate family into this idea. Family is family and any clash in the family is only a clash of interests. Conflict does not mean that everyone in the family is good or bad. Good does not mean following the same line. Aspirants are not good and the family is not bad. Aspirants are not bad and the family is not good. There is fifty percent good and bad in each one. If they have to associate with good ones, they should select those who identify more with the positive fifty percent than with the negative fifty percent. Many people identify more with the negative half than the good half, which makes them critical, negative, gloomy, dark, destructive and depressed. If one identifies with the positive fifty percent, one is affected positively.

One has to realize that just as one's moods change, other people's moods also change. One has to be flexible enough to adjust to a mood swing, which is only an external projection. Positivity and negativity are internal. Therefore, one should associate with people who are connected more with the positive fifty percent and avoid those who are deeply connected with the negative fifty percent. One may want to help them, but reality dictates the opposite. One cannot help the crooked. Crookedness is a condition of the mind; it is the stage where *tamas* is predominant. The *sattwic* nature is not strong enough to deal with that negative *tamas*, for everyone also fluctuates from that little bit of *sattwa* to something else.

If one is able to maintain inner positivity, then one will also associate with the right people. They will be attracted, for like attracts like. Therefore, rather than worrying about how one should relate to a person who is crooked and negative, one should think about how to adjust, adapt and maintain one's own sanity in this crooked world, and that will be the achievement.

How does one know if another person is wise or not, whether he is a saint or a charlatan?

Swami Satyananda: One must find out for oneself and not listen to what others say. They can only tell of their own personal preferences and prejudices, likes and dislikes. One must feel from one's own experience. If one feels really good in contact with a certain sage, then this is a good indication that one is on the right path. If one feels some peace then this is also a good sign. If there is a feeling of negativity this does not mean that one is not with a great sage, but that he or she is probably not destined to be part of one's path towards self-knowledge. One must go to satsang and test for oneself. There is no other method.

What should one do during satsang?

Swami Satyananda: Whatever comes naturally. If one wants to ask questions, and the opportunity arises, one should ask without feeling obliged. The most meaningful answers are communicated at deeper, more subtle levels. If one wants only to sit, one should sit; there is no need to do anything else.

Satsang is the essence of yogic life. We suggest that one contacts sages, though they are rare and not always easy to find. Some are world famous, others are unknown. However, if one starts to seek, one will find. Contact, whether regular or occasional, will help to bring order and sense into one's life. One will start to commune with the deeper layers of being, to tune in with that which underlies everything. With good reason it is said that spiritual life or rebirth begins with satsang.

At first, satsang means being in the actual company of sages, yogis, saints, one's guru, but eventually there is no need for this face-to-face confrontation. The satsang will occur even during physical separation. It will be with the particular sage one has tuned in with. It will mean continuous satsang with consciousness. One will commune with the deepest and central core of one's being. Everything becomes satsang . . . communion.

Can satsang be equated with group therapy sessions in psychotherapy?

Swami Satyananda: Satsang cannot really be equated with group therapy, even though one often tries to explain satsang in these terms.

There are various types of satsang. One can close the eyes and practise satsang all alone. Reading a spiritual book which deals with the topics of reality is also a form of satsang. Satsang happens when one is with a group listening to the glory of the divine being or the ways of purity and self-evolution. Hearing about the lives of those people who have suffered or lived for the divine experience is also satsang.

In satsang one may practise kirtan or meditation, but these are not satsang, they are only ways of conducting satsang. In satsang the most important thing is the constant movement of ideas related to the ultimate reality, divinity or highest being.

There are certain groups which I have come across in recent years in which people join together to do some practices and to help each other. There is a simple, scientific explanation for this. If a grandfather clock is put with many other small clocks, one will find that initially the movement of their pendulums does not coincide, but after some time all the clocks will be following the grandfather clock. This experiment has been repeated many times. Similarly, when a person plays a violin, the other violins in the room begin to resonate. If one listens carefully, one will find that the vibrations from the first violin are being transmitted through

the inactive violins. The same thing also happens in a group when people come together to help each other.

In India, there is not much need for these group sessions, for the social situation is still well organized. If a group of people live together in a joint family or in an ashram situation, they begin to understand the nature of human psychology. They have an opportunity to see where they stand in relation to one another. They are able to assess their own minds, their limitations and their faults, which is a great change from the modern culture.

In the west, particularly in this century, group therapy has become an important phenomenon. In the 18th and 19th centuries the situation was different. There was a more compact and well-knit family and community life. In the last one hundred and fifty years, the social structure has deteriorated bit by bit, and henceforth the need for group therapy has arisen.

The mind, however, is not the ultimate reality; there is something beyond the mind. People only talk in terms of the mind, as mind seems to be a barrier for many people. Actually, whatever is done in spiritual life is not done for the sake of the mind, but for the discovery of the universal spirit. Therefore, the path of psychotherapy can only be followed up to a certain extent then there comes a point where it must be left behind. Psychoanalysis can definitely be of great use at a certain stage of development, but eventually it becomes a barrier and must be transcended.

How does one maintain uplifting associations?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to the yogic literature, maintaining positive and uplifting associations is a must in developing the appropriate philosophy. One should be observant and watchful of one's associations, and know which are appropriate and inappropriate. Negative associations are powerful. One percent of negativity can alter ninety-nine percent of positive strengths and qualities. Ninety-nine percent positivity cannot change the power of

that one percent of negativity. Therefore, one has to enforce one's psychology with positive affirmations, thoughts and sankalpas.

There should be awareness of those associations and connections that restrict and inhibit the expression of the personality. When a farmer plants a special seed in the ground, he also makes arrangements to protect the seed from vermin, birds, animals, insects and the weather. The same principle applies to the cultivation of positive associations. One has to protect one's positivity from negative influences and stresses which create an imbalance in life. One has to regulate, observe and monitor one's associations and connect with the positive, creative and constructive. One should not try to change the negative. After all, every rose grows on a stem full of thorns. One can't remove all the thorns from all the roses. One has to connect with the beauty, harmony and nature of the rose and not with the stem. One has to ignore the thorns and look at the beauty of the rose. Even if one finds thorny situations, thorny people and circumstances, one can look at the beauty.

There are family members who are destructive, detrimental and restrictive and those who are optimistic and positive. How does one deal with them? Acknowledging one's association is a personal matter. The entire nature is governed by good and bad. When it is fifty-fifty, there is harmony. One's personality and nature is also fifty-fifty good and bad. When one is anxious, frustrated, depressed, negative or pessimistic, one is connecting with the dark side of one's personality. When one is at peace with oneself, one connects with the light side of one's personality. The whole of life in creation is fifty-fifty, plus and minus, positive and negative, optimistic and pessimistic. A dog can lick the master's face one day and take a big bite out of it the next. A human being who is a friend today can turn against the friend tomorrow. People who are in love feel united today and totally disunited and separate tomorrow. It depends which aspect of one's personality or perspective one con-

nects with. Certainly, connecting with the positive and the optimistic in life goes hand in hand with cultivating the right associations.

TULSIDAS

How can the example of Tulsidas help one understand the journey of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: The foundation of bhakti is only love, not faith and belief. There was a great personality in India who wrote the epic *Ramacharitamanas*, the story of Sri Rama. His name was Tulsidas, and his life was interesting. He was an ordinary person, suffering and going through the problems and difficulties of life. He eventually married and was madly in love with his young wife. He was so enamoured of her that he could not stay away from her for long periods of time.

One day she decided to visit her mother's home, and without informing Tulsidas she left. Tulsidas had gone to the market to buy vegetables for the evening meal, and when he returned he noticed that his wife was not there. He became disturbed, made enquiries, and when he came to know that she had gone to her mother's home, he decided to follow her. By the time he packed his bag it was evening and had begun to rain, which did not deter him. The river he had to cross was almost flooded. There was no ferry boat, so he just waited for some boat to come. Suddenly, in the darkness he saw a boat-like object come to the shore and he climbed on and crossed the river.

He reached the other side and went to the house of the mother-in-law. It was midnight and the house was locked. He knew that his wife was staying on the first floor, so without waking up the people of the house, he climbed to the balcony with the help of a rope, thinking, "Oh, my wife must have left the rope thinking I will be following her." When he reached the balcony, his wife opened the door and said, "What are you doing here in the middle of the night, while

it is raining so hard? How did you cross the river, how did you get up here?" Tulsidas told her, "Well, it is the rope you kept outside which allowed me to come up." She said, "Oh, but I didn't put any rope outside. Show me where the rope is." With a lantern they went outside, and instead of a rope they found a thick, big python-like snake hanging from the balcony, which he had mistaken for a rope and used to climb up.

His wife then asked, "And how did you cross the river?" He replied, "In a boat." The wife said, "Impossible. No boat or ferry goes across river at night. Show me the boat." Again they go with the lantern to the riverside and find the bloated corpse of a dead man, which he had mistaken for a boat and used to cross the river.

At that time, his wife only said one sentence to him: "If you loved God as you have loved me, you would have crossed the ocean of samsara." Only this sentence was spoken, and the husband, Tulsidas, left his wife, the riverside, everything, and in the course of his life he wrote the great epic *Ramacharitamanas*.

That was the turning point in Tulsidas' life. What kind of turning? The love which was directed towards his wife he redirected towards God. Once that love was redirected towards God, away from his wife, he changed from an ordinary person into a saint. It was that love in him which eventually gave birth to faith and belief.

It is this love which is the foundation of bhakti yoga, for without love one cannot place trust, faith or belief in anyone. If one places belief, trust and faith in anyone, it will be due to love for them. Therefore, love is the primary ingredient, and it is from this love other feelings grow.

How did Tulsidas develop one-pointed devotion?

Swami Satyananda: What was the intensity of his emotions? He was blinded by love for his wife. He crossed a river in the middle of the night, riding on a dead body, amidst heavy rain, just to see her at her parents' house. When he finally

reached her, she spoke harsh words to him, which shocked him. Her harsh comments completely transformed his life and overnight his bhakti developed. This devotion already existed inside him, but it was being directed towards his wife. When she gave him this mighty push, the direction of his bhakti changed. She was just the medium. It has also been said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Sundarkand, after doha 47, chau 2 to 3):

*Janani janaka bandhu suta daaraa,
Tanu dhanu bhavana suhrida parivaaraa,
Saba kai mamataa taaga batoree,
Mama pada manahi baandha bari doree.*

Collect the threads of attachment
To parents, wife, children, relatives,
Body, wealth, property and family.
Twist them together to make a rope
And mentally tie it to My feet.

What happened when Tulsidas had darshan of Sri Rama at Chitrakoot?

Swami Satyananda: Tulsidas used to live in Chitrakoot because it was sanctified by Sri Rama during his exile. Tulsidas was an ordinary Brahmin and not very rich, so, for a living he made and applied sandal paste for pilgrims for one or two anna (small coins). One day a bright young man appeared before him. As Tulsidas looked at him and applied the tilak, he knew at once that he was Sri Rama because the figure changed. He was carrying a bow and arrow and the hands reached to the knees. Rama is known as *Ajanu Bahu*, he whose hands reach to the knees. The complexion of Sri Rama was that of a blue lotus; he was not fair. The moment Tulsidas went to touch Sri Rama's feet, the figure disappeared.

Did Tulsidas have darshan of Sri Rama on other occasions?

Swami Sivananda: While returning from answering the calls of nature, Tulsidas used to throw the water that was left in his water pot at the roots of a tree which a spirit was occupying.

The spirit was very much pleased with Tulsidas. The spirit said, “O Man! Get a boon from me.” Tulsidas replied, “Let me have darshan of Sri Rama.” The spirit said, “Go to the Hanuman temple. There Hanuman comes in the guise of a leper to hear the *Ramayana* as the first listener and leaves the place last of all. Get hold of him. He will help you.” Accordingly, Tulsidas met Hanuman, and through His grace had darshan of Sri Rama.

THE POWER OF SATSANG

Does association refer only to the people one interacts with?

Swami Niranjanananda: Association should be seen from all perspectives, not only the physical or social, but also the ideological, emotional and spiritual. There are ideologies that govern the human intellect and ideologies that touch the human heart. Ideologies that touch the human head or intellect, create or derive the kind of response which is sequential, linear and orderly. Ideologies and thoughts that touch the human heart derive a response which is more creative, artistic and universal in nature. If one uses the head, the intellect, to decide, one will notice that the first response is towards oneself. What will I gain from it? How will this situation, event or condition help me? So the intellect becomes more self-centred, self-oriented, even selfish.

Ideologies governing the heart project the emotions and sentiments outwards, which connects one with other people. These are the spiritual ideology, the spiritual behaviour, thoughts and virtues that make one more connected with the world and more selfless. Intellectual ideologies make one more self-centred, more aware of oneself and more selfish. When one is selfish, there is isolation from the world. When one is selfless, there is connection with the world. Therefore, association has to be seen in relation to one's ideologies, thoughts and beliefs, which can be social, cultural, academic, or religious in nature.

How did Mohammed use satsang?

Swami Satyananda: Just as there are *dhabas*, where trucks stop for the night, fill water, eat a meal, there used to be caravanserais where the camels of a caravan would stop for the night. There would be water, arrangements for food, and the camels would be tied to pegs. Prophet Mohammed was a boy who worked in such a caravanserai, and he had a great belief in God since early childhood. At night when the day's work was over, he would go somewhere and pray. When people started to talk a lot, he was married off. She was a girl from a very rich family of Medina. The marriage, however, did not have much of an effect on him. He would still go off every night with his black blanket and sit and meditate in the nearby mountains.

One day Mohammed felt the presence of God there and he began to hear the verses of the *Koran*. Just as we call the Vedas *shruti*, meaning 'that which is heard', similarly the *Koran* is also *shruti*. Mohammed Sahab could not write anything – he was illiterate. Whatever he heard, he gradually started to tell people. He would explain it to people in small gatherings and meetings, and people even began to accept his words. He was a devotee, a *bhakta*, and people are naturally attracted to those who practise bhakti. Many people even started to be annoyed at what he said, as there is cheating, deception and hypocrisy everywhere in established religion. When he started talking openly against hypocrisy, people became very angry. They would throw stones at his meetings or disturb them in some other way. However, Mohammed Sahab fearlessly kept talking and the number of his followers kept growing.

He would say just one thing, "God is one, everything is done by Him, we are all His servants, whatever you want, ask Him, you do not need intermediaries and priests." Devotion to God is not something that should be used for earning money. That I have become a sadhu should not be an excuse to take money from people. That is not the dharma of a sadhu or a priest. If people make offerings out of love, that

is one thing, but one should not lie and con money out of them. He would say things like this straight upfront.

The frequency of attacks on him started increasing and there were conspiracies to kill him. His followers asked him to run away, and so he fled Mecca for Medina. That day is generally accepted to be the start of the Muslim almanac. His in-laws lived in Medina. They were rich and politically well-connected. They said to him, “Son-in-law, the *Koran* alone will not do. Hold a sword in one hand and the *Koran* in the other.” The sword, meaning an army, was given to him. He would set off with a band of forty or fifty soldiers and give discourses that were attended by thousands of people.

How does shravana transform a devotee?

Swami Sivananda: Shravana is listening to the stories of God that are connected with His divine name and form. It includes hearing about His virtues, glories and sports. The devotee becomes absorbed in the hearing of divine stories. When the mind merges in the thought of divinity, it is no longer charmed by the world and cannot think of non-divine things. In this way, the devotee remembers God only, even when dreaming. The *upasaka*, the devotee worshipping, should sit before a learned teacher who is saintly, and hear the stories. He should hear them with a sincere heart, devoid of criticism and fault-finding. He should try his best to live by the ideals preached in the scriptures. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna says (4:34):

*Tadviddhi pranipaatena pariprashnena sevayaa;
Upadekshyanti te jnaanam jnaaninastattvadarshinah.*

Know that by long prostration, service and enquiry, the wise who know the Truth shall instruct thee in that wisdom.

Can satsang be a remedy for loneliness?

Swami Satyananda: Satsang plays an important role in shaping one’s life and personality. There is nothing as powerful as satsang in changing the thoughts, moods, sentiments and actions of an individual. If one has a mind

to change the broken and disorganized patterns of one's life, one should go through a course of satsang for some time: reading sacred texts, dwelling in pious thoughts and thoughts about atman, in the company of saints, hearing of devotional songs and divine stories. These are various forms of satsang. Satsang is the surest cure for the dire disease of loneliness. Even in the midst of thousands of people, there are people who feel lonely. To relieve loneliness one may play badminton, mix in society and do similar things, but this is not the ultimate remedy. That is self-hypnotism. There is every possibility of self-deception and self-hypnotism. To sit alone and think of God, to make Him one's best friend and talk to Him mentally is the remedy.

What are the benefits of reading the scriptures or satsang?

Swami Satyananda: One should always feel in tune with God. To keep in tune with Him, it is necessary to expose oneself to satsang from time to time. Without satsang, one cannot develop discrimination. Through satsang one's devotion to God becomes strong. To have real satsang, one only needs His grace. In satsang one experiences association with truth. One should sing God's name and study the scriptures pertaining to bhakti, the lives of saints, great souls and sannyasins and obtain inspiration from them. To read good books like the *Ramacharitamanas*, *Srimad Bhagavatam* and *Guru Granth Sahib*. *Ramacharitamanas* is the most powerful tonic for generating bhakti. One should read it regularly to please God and to please oneself.

It is a fact that if one wants to establish a relationship with God, then satsang is a must. Unless and until one has satsang, clarity regarding God eludes the devotee. Without satsang there is no sense of discrimination and without the grace of God there is no ease in sadhana.

It is by the grace of God that satsang has come my way and through me it has come your way. The biggest benefit of this comes to me. When one hears and speaks about Sri Rama, it becomes satsang. When one sings the name of

Rama, it becomes sankirtan. When one hears about him and chants his name, one has both satsang and sadhana.

Why is satsang important on the spiritual path?

Swami Satyananda: Through satsang devotion to God becomes strong. To have real satsang, one only needs His grace. Satsang is where one experiences the presence or association with truth, the true existence.

One should have satsang from time to time, sing God's name, and study the scriptures pertaining to bhakti, devotion to God. One should study the lives of saints and great souls. India has produced many great souls such as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, and everyone should read about their lives. India has given birth to many householders, like Tukaram, Kabirdas, Nanak Dev, Guru Govind Singh and others, who had children and still led great lives. This country has given birth to many saints, mahatmas and sannyasins. One should read about their lives and get inspiration from them. This advice is for everybody.

This path is long and arduous. If it were easier, everyone would attain enlightenment without any effort. People have been making effort after effort to seek God in their minds. However, at the last moment God's name does not come. The mental conditioning is such that at the last moment one says, "Call my daughter-in-law; call my son." One is unable to utter anything else.

People who are on the spiritual path should keep on striving, continuously and regularly. The way to attain God is through satsang. In satsang, one should listen to discourses by learned, virtuous, enlightened souls. If one lives in that atmosphere, it will help. It has been said in the *Yoga Vasishtha*: 'The company of great souls is beneficial at all times. Satsang with learned persons turns adversity into fortune'.

One has to be in touch through satsang all the time. Without satsang, bhakti is not possible. In the *Ramacharita-manas* Kakabhushundi says to Garuda (Uttarakanda, after doha 119, chau 8 to 10):

*. . . More mana prabhu asa bisvaasaa,
Raama te adhika raama kara daasaa.
Raama sindhu ghana sajjana dheeraa,
Chandana taru hari santa sameeraa.
Saba kara phala hari bhagati suhaae,
So binu santa na kaahoo paaee.
Asa bichaari joi kara satasangaa,
Raama bhagati tehi sulabha bihangaa.*

O my Lord, I have this conviction in my heart
That a servant of Sri Rama is greater than Sri Rama
Himself.

While Sri Rama is the ocean, the wise saints are like
the rain clouds.

While Hari is the sandal tree, the saints represent the
winds (which diffuse the perfume).

Devotion to Hari, which is so delightful, is the reward
of all spiritual endeavours.

None has secured it without the help of a saint.

Realizing this, whoever cultivates the fellowship of saints
Easily attains devotion to Sri Rama, O King of birds. (8-10)

Why is bhakti a natural outcome of regular attendance at satsang?

Swami Sivananda: There is nothing so inspiring, elevating, solacing and delightful as satsang. Satsang is the greatest of all purifiers and illuminators of man. Faith in God, in scriptures, attachment and devotion to God, slowly develop in those who are regular in satsang. Satsang is unfailing in its results. The effect of saintly contact is unerring or infallible.

First comes keeping company with the righteous and good men and serving them. By such company and service there dawns the knowledge of the essential nature of one's own self and the Divine or Supreme Self. Then comes *vairagya* or a total disgust for everything of this world and of the next, with a yearning for God. This is bhakti. When bhakti becomes strong, the individual becomes the beloved

of God, and because of such dearness to Him, he is chosen by Him. Then comes the direct vision of the Divine.

Those who hear the life-giving words of good men have their hearts that are tainted with evil, purified. They ultimately reach the lotus feet of the Divine.

The stories of the incarnations of God are most elevating, inspiring and soul-stirring. They instil devotion in the hearts of the hearers. There is a mysterious and marvellous charm in the stories pertaining to avatars. A sincere devotee loses himself in the stories of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. Hearing the stories of God removes the impurities of the mind and ultimately leads to God-realization.

How does satsang help to change one's karma?

Swami Satyananda: The most important influence on karma is through associations, good or bad company. While emphasizing this point in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Balakanda, after doha 2, chau 3 to 5), Tulsidas says:

*So jaanaba satasanga prabhaao,
Lokahu beda na aana upaao.
Binu satasanga bibeka na hoee,
Raama kripaa binu sulabha na soee.
Satasangata muda mangala moolaa,
Soi phala sidhi saba saadhana phoolaa.
Satha sudharahi satasangati paaee,
Paarasa parasa kudhaata suhaaee.*

These are the effects of satsang.
No other way is available
In the world or in the Vedas.
Without satsang, discrimination cannot be attained.
That too is not possible
Without the grace of Rama.
Satsang is the root of blissful wellbeing.
That is the perfection of all fruits,
The flower of all means.
Even wicked people are reformed by satsang,

In the same way that iron is transformed into gold
By the philosopher's stone. (3-5)

Satsang is the origin of bliss. A ruffian or a tyrant can improve with the company of the wise. A wicked man can also improve with satsang. Supposing someone had a bad previous birth, or his parents did not give him the right training. Through contact with good company, he can improve. Through bad associations, children of good families can be spoiled. The company that one keeps depends on the environment. A person goes to school or college, reads books, watches films and sings songs; these are also associations. Anything that one interacts with in one's life is a form of association. Rishi Muni has said, "Just as a drop of water shines on a lotus leaf, thus is the glory of positive associations."

One can see the second virtue of good company for oneself. What is a conch? It is an animal bone, but since it is in God's hand, even brahmins raise it to their lips. It is said that the conch stayed in the hands of Narayana for a long time and the result was that devotees have to bow their heads to that piece of bone. By the power of positive association, Ravana became the devotee of Rama at the time of his death. So Tulsidas says (Sundarkanda, doha 4):

*Taata svarga apabarga sukha dharia tulaa eka anga,
Toola na taahi sakala mili jo sukha lava satasanga.*

If all the happiness of the heavens, and ultimate bliss
Are placed on one side of the balance,
Then taken together they cannot measure
The happiness obtained from one iota of satsang.

How does Sri Rama define association?

Swami Niranjanananda: The characteristics of good and bad people have been defined by Sri Rama in the *Ramayana*: "The conduct of good and bad people can be compared to sandalwood and an axe. The axe cuts down the sandal tree

while the latter in turn perfumes the axe by imparting its virtue. Good people, as a rule, have no hankering for the pleasures of the senses, and are expressions of amiability, friendliness and other virtues. Good people grieve to see others in distress and rejoice at the sight of others' joy. They are even-minded and look upon none as their enemy. They are free from vanity and passion, and they are conquerors of greed, anger, joy and fear. Tender-hearted and compassionate to the distressed, they cherish guileless devotion in thought, word and deed and give honour to all. They are modest. Having no self-interested motive of their own, they are the abode of tranquillity, dispassion, humility and good humour. Such a person is a good person whose heart is a home of all such noble qualities as placidity, guilelessness, friendliness and devotion. They never swerve from control of their mind and senses. They never move away from correct behaviour and never utter a harsh word. Such people are dear to me.

“Here are the characteristics of the bad and impious, association with whom should be scrupulously avoided, for their company ever brings woe. The hearts of the wicked suffer terrible agony for they burn at the sight of others' prosperity and happiness. Whenever they hear others reviled, they feel happy as though they had stumbled on a treasure lying on the road. They are devoted to sensuality, anger, arrogance and greed. They are merciless, deceitful, crooked and impure. They bear enmity towards all without rhyme or reason, even those who are actively kind to them. They are fake in their dealings. They have falsehood in their dinner and falsehood in their breakfast. Whatever they eat is intended to deceive others. They speak honeyed words but they have stony hearts. Malevolent by nature, they enjoy others' wives and others' wealth, and take delight in slandering others. Such vile and sinful men are demons in a human body. Greed is their covering and greed is their bedding. They are given to sensual enjoyment and gluttony, and have no fear of punishment.

“If they ever hear anyone exalted, they heave a deep sigh as though they had an attack of ego or jealousy. When they find anyone in distress, they rejoice as though they had attained sovereignty of the whole world. Devoted to their own selfish interests, they antagonize their people. They recognize neither mother nor father, nor preceptor nor God. They bring ruin upon themselves. Overcome by infatuation, they bear malice for others and have no love for communion with good people. They are full of hypocrisy and deceit at heart, and outwardly have a saintly appearance. Therefore, association with such people should be avoided.”

How does satsang help to develop faith and trust?

Swami Satyananda: The aspirant should aim to develop the qualities of faith and trust by good satsang, not the satsang where politics and caste come in. While highlighting the importance of satsang, Tulsidas says in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Uttarakanda, doha 61):

*Binu satasanga na hari kathaa
tehi binu moha na bhaaga,
Moha gae binu raama pada
hoi na dridha anuraaga.*

Without satsang, no story of Rama is possible,
And without that, there is no destruction of delusion.
Without the destruction of delusion
No strong devotion to the feet of Rama is possible.

How can satsang bring about change?

Swami Satyananda: Satsang will bring about conscious and unconscious changes in one's being. It will inspire and bring change in one's attitudes. It will open up new horizons and vistas and one will start to see new meaning and potential in life. Slowly it can transform one's understanding and perception of one's being. Life will start to show new, undreamt-of promise. It can be said that the energy vibrations of a sage function at a more subtle level. These

vibrations can change and charge one's mind and energy field. His aura will transform one's aura. His psychic battery will charge one's psychic battery. A sage is a transformer of energy flow, but one must be receptive. Whether one is aware of these changes or not, they will nevertheless occur.

The mind has a tendency to remain in a rut of false beliefs and conditioning; it is full of knots. One can never remove these by oneself. One has to receive treatment from another person – a spiritual doctor, a sage, yogi or saint. The sage can say almost anything – perhaps significant or insignificant, either obviously or not obviously directed at the listener, perhaps seemingly superficial statements of fact, gossip or philosophical ideas, whatever – but these words can help to shake and upset the 'boat' of mental lethargy and fixity existing in the mind. The mind is changed and sent in new directions. One may or may not be aware of the process, but it will happen.

The faculty of discrimination can only be sharpened by satsang; this is absolutely necessary for progress in yoga. Normally one's thoughts revolve and revolve in the wheels of the mind without being able to escape from built-in misconceptions. Only satsang can break up the grooves of the mind. Yet the chance to attend satsang only comes with the grace of Sri Rama; that is when one is ready to listen. Here is a quotation from *Ramacharitamanas* (Balakanda, doha 2):

*Suni samujhahi jana mudita mana majjahi ati anuraaga;
Lahahi chaari phala achhata tanu saadhu samaaja prayaaga.*

Wise people take a bath in the holy water of satsang.
In this way they clean and purify their inner being.
Liquid water cleans the body; the 'water' of satsang
cleans the mind.

In Balakanda (after doha 2, chau 5) it is also said:

*Satha sudharahi satasangati paaee;
Paarasa parasa kudhaata suhaaee.*

Satsang is like the philosopher's stone. Even the most wicked people have been transformed by the power of satsang, in the same way that the philosopher's stone changes iron into gold.

The writer of the *Ramayana*, Valmiki, is a good example of this transformation. He was a robber for many years. Then he met his guru Narada Muni and attended satsang. He was a pessimist and he did not believe in saints and yogis. Yet in time his whole life was transformed. He became a great yogi and was eventually inspired to write the *Ramayana* to help others. If one attends satsang, this same change may occur, perhaps even against one's will.

VALMIKI

How did Ratnakar become Valmiki?

Swami Sivananda: Ratnakar was a great robber. He used to waylay the passers-by, kill them mercilessly and take all they had. He was creating great havoc. Luckily he met Rishi Narada and this meeting entirely changed his life. He repeated *Mara, Mara* with devotion and practised deep meditation for several years. He never left his seat. He was so much absorbed in divine contemplation that an ant-hill formed around his body. This gave him the name Valmiki, an anthill. He became a distinguished poet and wrote the *Ramayana*.

How powerful are mantras as tools for personal evolution?

Swami Satyananda: Ratnakar, a dacoit, used to rob and murder travellers. Once he accosted a group of sadhus and began to rob them. Sadhus are slippery because of their experience in life. One of them said to Ratnakar, "Why are you doing this? Aren't you bothered about the karma you are acquiring?" Ratnakar replied, "I am doing this for my parents who need to be looked after." The sadhu said, "If you are doing this for them, you should at least ask them

first whether they will share the punishment of this karma with you.”

Ratnakar went home and said to his father, “I steal, rob and murder for your sake. Will you share the punishment of these bad deeds with me?” His father refused point blank. “Why should I share the results of your bad deeds? You rob and murder, so you suffer the punishment.” This opened Ratnakar’s eyes. He gave up being a dacoit and became the sadhu’s disciple. The sadhu gave him the mantra *Mara*, meaning dead. While chanting this mantra continuously, however, it became *Rama*, and thus Ratnakar became Valmiki. That strange and drastic event turned him from a robber and murderer into a saint. It has also been said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Ayodhyakanda, after doha 193, chau 4):

*Ulataa naamu japata jagu jaanaa,
Baalameeki bhae brahma samaanaa.*

By repeating the name of the Lord,
Although in reverse order,
Valmiki became like Brahma
Which is known to all the world.

How did Sage Narada help Valmiki?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sage Valmiki was a dacoit and Sage Narada asked him to chant the mantra *Rama*, yet he was unable to utter it. Narada said to him, “Say *Mara* instead.” *Mara* means ‘dead’ and Valmiki could say it easily since he was used to killing people. As he continued to chant *Mara*, *Mara*, *Mara*, *Mara*, it converted to *Rama*, *Rama*, *Rama*, *Rama*. As he continued to chant the mantra, it brought about a transformation in his consciousness and he became one with *Rama*.

3

Identification with Godly Qualities

Identifying with the positive and the uplifting qualities of godhood is the second form of bhakti yoga. In the Indian tradition, people have defined the qualities that must exist in a yogi, a saint or a realized being. Through identification with these qualities there will be identification with, and understanding of the nature of God, and a transformation of the whole personality can take place.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

MANAGING THE EGO

Does the ego prevent one from seeing or experiencing divinity?

Swami Satyananda: What Tulsidas calls *drishtidosha*, defective vision, I call a cataract. This is the *ahamkara*, the ego, within everyone. One should pray to God so that He knocks at the door and removes this cataract from one's eyes. When there are cataracts one cannot see what is right in front. Even though God is right in front, one fails to see Him. This blind spot is truly man's ego. The funniest thing is that one does not even know one suffers from this ego. People pray to Him to remove this ego, but they are not aware of the concept of ego. They would claim to be good people.

The first point is that many people do not see their ego. It is like defecating but refusing to look at the faeces because it is considered to be dirty. They flush it away or call the sweeper to pick it up and throw it away. No one has seen this ego. What is its shape? The scriptures and the vedantic texts have described this ego in detail, but still no one tries to visualize it. No one feels for it and so no one understands it. That is why people pray to God to keep them clean of this dirty word 'ego'. They pray, "Take this self away from me, I can't use it anymore."

The whole world is in a deep crisis because of this self or ego. Kingdoms are breaking down. Homes are falling apart. Even couples who have sworn to love each other quarrel publicly because of that powerful ego. Sages and seers have declared that this feeling of self is a personality aberration. It is the greatest obstacle between God and the devotee. I do not know why people are so egoistic. I also do not know why I feel the presence of God but do not experience His presence all the time. What happens during these experiences I also fail to recollect. Why this is so, I am unable to explain. Maybe it happens because of myself. The day that this self is completely obliterated, then, like a pitcher full of water breaking in the sea, my own self will merge with the Almighty. Then neither I nor my ego are there, both are lost and merge together.

How does bhakti help manage the ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: The best way to manage the ego is to develop bhakti. *Bhakti* is devotion, not directed to a particular person but to one's own inner being.

How does listening to stories of the divine help in becoming egoless?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first form of bhakti is, in colloquial language, listening to lilas or stories of divine beings. If one thinks with the rational mind, then these lilas about enlightened beings can help inspire one to accept a different lifestyle, mentality and mode of behaviour.

However, it also has a psychological meaning. It is the nature of the mind to involve itself in constant gossip and criticism. The moment one stops the mind gossiping and criticizing, it becomes calm, peaceful and fixed. It begins to experience a different kind of personal nature, which is not attracted to the world of senses and objects. That is the experience of *shoonyata*, the void, awareness of a different quality manifesting.

One can go one step further in one's inner transformation to an awareness of qualities which are not manifesting now, and rise above the influence of ego and identity of 'mine' and 'I', for one identifies with thoughts actions, beliefs, ambitions, ego, the world, family and society. Identification is not bad, yet the moment one becomes indispensable in the process of identification, the ego becomes powerful.

What is the relationship between vairagya and one's ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: To be egoless it is necessary to have vairagya and live in the world but not be of the world. In fact, the entire philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* is based on this principle: do what you have to do, fulfil your dharma, carry out your obligations, but do not think that you are the indispensable one. Do not have any attachment to the results of the actions, for attachment is another way of identifying with the ego.

One may be attached to something, whether to a person, or to the results of an action. Wherever there is even the slightest inkling of attachment, there is a connection with ego. Possessiveness, desire and ambition are all involved in attachment. To be egoless is to have vairagya, a vision of life where one is able to experience the state of non-being in the world of maya.

How is one's ego an expression of conditioning?

Swami Niranjanananda: One form of bhakti yoga is incorporating the transcendental, humanitarian and unconditioned qualities into everyday life. The qualities which one expresses

in life are conditioned qualities which have some restrictions and motivations in them. The word for quality is *guna*. The real language of living is expressing those qualities which are cosmic, divine and human and which are not conditioned. These qualities are free from every kind of mental or manifest impression.

People talk of affection, yet in their affection there is always some form of desire and attachment. They talk of love, yet mixed with their love is some form of desire and attachment. There is always something that they want to gain. In their compassion, there is some form of desire and attachment. These are the conditioned aspects of qualities which can be both material and spiritual. Love is one quality, and it can be positive or negative, *sattwic* or *tamasic*. Compassion is another quality, and it can also be positive or negative, *sattwic* or *tamasic*. Affection can take the form of attachment or it can take the form of universal feeling for everyone, free from inner animosity. When one is free from the attractions and repulsions of life, then love is experienced.

What constitutes the individual ego?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a story. Imagine you are not yet born. In the depth of space, somewhere in the universe, somebody calls you and says, "Listen you have to go and pack. You have to go to Earth and take birth there, so go and pack your luggage." In the remote corner of space, in the dark, you go and find your bag, pack your basic necessities, come to God and say, "I'm ready to travel." God says, "OK. Take this flight; this shuttle will go to the womb of that person. You get off there and that is your station." You enter the cosmic shuttle, the shuttle drops you in the womb of somebody, with your baggage, and you take a physical birth.

When you are born, what is born with you? The body is born with you, senses come with you as part of the body, mind comes in, and spirit comes in. Five senses, one mind – they are the companions of spirit. They are the agents of

spirit through which the spirit functions in this world, and therefore it is said that our karmas come back. It is not the spirit which brings them. It is the mind, the individual mind, the ego, which brings the individual karmas. If it were only spirit coming into this life then there would be no karma, yet when the mind comes in with spirit, there is the karma of the past which continues in this life. When the mind comes, it comes with six habits: *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada* and *matsarya*, which are all subject to ego. *Kama*, passion or self-gratification; *krodha*, anger or self-abuse; *lobha*, greed or wanting to possess and acquire for oneself; *moha*, self-identification, infatuation; *mada*, arrogance and pride; *matsarya*, jealousies and envies.

To say, “Who the hell are you?” is envy and jealousy; it is an expression of *matsarya*. Many people express their *matsarya* every day – “Who are you to tell me this?” Many people express their *mada*, arrogance, every day – “No, I shall not believe you.” These are all expressions of ego.

In *asana* and *pranayama* of *hatha yoga*, one masters the body, however that does not change anything qualitatively in one’s life. In *raja yoga* one finds a little bit of peace and balance and de-stresses oneself. One becomes better at dealing with life’s situations, but nothing more than that. To bring out the power of the positive qualities, one has to follow the path of *bhakti yoga*. *Bhakti yoga* becomes the antidote to crush the head of the Hydra, which has six heads – *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*. Once the Hydra is killed, the ego becomes humble, and with humility the positive aspects of life flower. *Bhakti yoga* is the flowering of the positive qualities of life.

Why is it necessary to become a changed person?

Swami Sivananda: Before one can claim to be an aspirant, one should fully realize the importance of becoming a changed person morally and ethically.

Aspirants should carefully avoid the dangers of self-deception by means of constant vigilance and introspection.

When their entire nature is changed, purified and prepared, grace will flow by itself in the firmament of their pure heart. Bliss will spontaneously flow and fill them when they have emptied themselves of all egoism, harshness, pride and passion. Perfection and immortality will be theirs. Where there is kindness, humility, purity and love, there spirituality springs up, saintliness shines, divinity descends and perfection manifests itself.

How was Mataji Omkareshwari an example of identification with godly qualities?

Swami Sivananda: Mataji Omkareshwari was a sannyasini who lived for over fifteen years in Rishikesh. She came from Gujarat. She was a jnani and a bhakta. She knew Sanskrit well. She was trained by her father, a Paramahansa sannyasi who was her real guru.

She was a fearless lady. She had lived for some time in dense jungles where human beings cannot enter. She had a wonderful way of explaining things in Vedanta with beautiful illustrations. She composed many thrilling divine songs in Gujarati. Sometimes she would take her tamera and play bhajan along with her disciple Swami Atmanandaji. It would be simply grand and thrilling. She was very kind, with the spirit of service deeply ingrained in her. She would serve all the sadhus in the vicinity with shraddha and bhav. Love, devotion, faith, liberality, joyfulness and endurance were the prominent virtues in her. She entered into mahasamadhi in November 1935.

BEING EGOLESS

What does emptying oneself mean?

Swami Sivananda: Lord Jesus says: “Empty yourself and I will fill you.” The meaning is, ‘Destroy your egoism and you will be filled with God’.

What is involved in the experience of surrender to guru?

Swami Satyananda: I went to Rishikesh and met Swami Sivananda. The influence was spontaneous; I did not have to assess him or decide whether to stay with him or not. In his presence, my analytical mind became stupefied. If the mind is shut, at that time one will not think. That was my first experience with my guru. In the presence of guru, the intellect is silenced, and only the heart grows. There is no thinking through the power of reasoning. That is called surrender. Surrender does not mean prostrating before someone. Surrender means the surrender of ego and intellect, but this cannot be done on one's own. Surrendering the ego is the most difficult thing in life. *Abhiman* means ego. Swami Sivananda composed a song:

Give up a raja, zaminder abhiman,
Give up male-female sex abhiman,
Give up a sannyasi-guru abhiman,
See Brahman in every face.

Give up the ego of a landlord,
Give up the ego of a king,
Give up the ego of a sannyasi,
Give up the ego of a righteous man,
Give up the ego of a virtuous man
and see God in every face, and contemplate:
'I am as humble as a blade of grass'.

Why is it said that bhakti is best of all yogas?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is the only yoga in which one transcends the last barrier in life which separates one from God. That barrier is that of *ahamkara*, the self-identity. Just as hatha yoga is good for body and prana, and raja yoga is good for mind and the mental expressions, so bhakti yoga is a yoga which softens the ego. The ego is hard in everybody, like a hard potato. When a potato is hard, when the ego is hard, nothing much can be done with it. Boiling the potato

will make it soft. The more it is boiled, the softer it becomes, and the softer it is, the tastier it becomes.

How can this potato be made soft? To make the potato soft there is only one way: boiling water. To make the ego soft there is only one way: bhakti. The softer the ego becomes, the more natural and spontaneous one becomes in life. One becomes less of a hypocrite in life and puts on fewer masks on a day-to-day basis. That is the power of bhakti. People associate bhakti with emotion, yet emotions are only expressions of your ego.

How does ego prevent love from blossoming forth?

Swami Satyananda: Men do not love beauty, they love quality. In the same way, women do not love strong men, they do not love wealthy men; they love a man who is a man. However, it is not possible to be perfect in life. If one expects perfection throughout, there is going to be a great disaster. First of all, perfection is an impossibility because it would completely destroy the laws of nature. Secondly, if everybody became perfect there would be so much uniformity that nothing would seem beautiful. Therefore, the most important thing is to extricate and eliminate the ego. But how to do it?

Can one remove the ego by psychoanalysis? Can one do it by self-analysis? Can one do it by repentance? No, people have tried but they have failed. In western countries throughout the world there are so many people who are going to psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, but still the ego is destroying family life and social life. Therefore, there must be an emphasis on the practice of bhakti yoga. If one just practises hatha yoga, selfishness will not go. If one only practises jnana yoga, selfishness and the ego will not go. There are two yogas which are important for properly treating egocentricity. One is bhakti yoga and the other is karma yoga.

How does seeing God everywhere lead to surrender?

Swami Sivananda: Man is an egoistic entity. His only enemy is the ego. He feels that he is entirely different from other things of the world. He is convinced that he is sharply marked off from the universe by his physical body. He is sure that he is only the body even though he may try to deny it in any way. When he says 'I' he always points to his chest and not to the yonder tree. Many unfortunate Vedantins feel that when they assert "I am Brahman", they mean only that the body is Brahman. It is difficult to separate the 'I' from the notion of the body. When one says, "I am Ramakrishna," one means only that the body is Ramakrishna. No one can get rid of this notion of the body as the real Self. The ideal of all branches of yoga is to root out this sense of ego.

Bhakti yoga is a method to kill the sense of separateness or egoism. It annihilates the modifications of the mind and fills the individual with Universal Consciousness. A bhakta says, "O Lord! I am Yours. All is Yours. I am not a separate entity. I have no power to do anything. You are doing everything. I am Your instrument. O Lord! You are everywhere. I cannot even move, for You are everywhere. I am walking over Your body. I am not able to live separately for I am seeing You everywhere. You appear as the man and the woman, and as the old man that totters with a stick on the road. You have become everything. I have no independence. I am Your slave. A slave can do only what the master commands him to do. I am doing nothing. You are doing it through me. You are the doer. You are the enjoyer. I am nothing. Thy will be done."

This is divine love, the highest type of love. The ego cannot assert itself, for God alone is everywhere. The mind cannot modify itself into vrittis of sense objects for there is no object except God. Who is there to be loved or hated? The bhakta is therefore blissful at all times. The mind cannot think of anything, for everything is God.

God is filling every speck of space. The whole world is clothed with the glory of God. The saint and the sinner, the

virtuous and the vicious, the good and the bad, man and animal are all forms of God. How can the mind deal with them in an undivine way?

There the mind experiences samadhi. The mind has consciousness, but it has no object. This is samadhi. Samadhi is thoughtless consciousness, objectless knowledge. This is *para bhakti*, the highest devotion. This is one with vedantic realization, *sakshatkara*. The effect of both is annihilation of the ego or destruction of the mind. The mind cannot live without an object of perception. God, who is supremely powerful, supremely wise and supremely blissful is pervading the entire atmosphere and the earth. He is the earth and the heaven. He is the father and the mother, brother and sister. God is the consummation of all love and aspiration, desire and ambition. He is the ideal to be attained.

Objective consciousness is dead when the presence of God is felt everywhere. The sense objects are transformed into the glory of divinity. A wife or husband is no more an object of lust, and money is not a property to be coveted. Everything is God and nothing but God. All are to be worshipped. "The ass, the dog and the chandala, the outcast are to be saluted," said Sri Krishna to Uddhava, "for all is God." This is equal to saying *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*.

The illustration of the two varieties of samadhi is found in the *rasa lila* of Sri Krishna. At first the gopis perceive that all is Sri Krishna alone, which is equal to *savikalpa samadhi*. Afterwards they feel that even they themselves are Krishna, which is equal to *nirvikalpa samadhi* where the sense of ego is absent. The *Srimad Bhagavatam* is the bhakta's bible. It illustrates the various kinds of *rasas* and modes of developing *bhakti*.

Controlling the mind and annihilating the ego is the essence of all yoga. Whatever name is given to the yoga and whatever the methods employed, the ideal to be achieved is annihilation of the mind and the ego. This is the ideal of *bhakti yoga*, which is a sweet and easy method. The bhakta does not have to curb the emotions and run away to the

forests. He has to direct his emotions to God and he has to see God as present in the world. This is the essence of bhakti sadhana. Bhakti is thus only a reflection of the love for the Self which the Upanishads declare. Only the names are different – one person calls it Self, another person calls it God. Names do not matter much. It is feeling that counts which is the same.

Self-surrender is the highest form of bhakti. Self-surrender is surrender of the ego or individuality. What remains is the Absolute of the Vedantins. Thus there is no difference between Vedanta and the highest form of bhakti. A bhakta surrenders the ego and a Vedantin disintegrates the ego. The ego is not there in both. Their ideals are the same and there is no quarrel between the two. Whether bhakti or Vedanta is followed, the effect is annihilation of the ego. This is the truth.

How does surrender give liberation?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* it is said (sutra 27):

Eeshvarasyaapyabhimaanadveshitvaad dainyapriyatvaachcha.

Devotion is higher than the others, because God hates egoism and loves humility.

A devotee absolutely depends upon God alone. He is in communion with the Divine. He is ever peaceful and blissful. Those who run after powers and depend upon their own effort fall and become miserable.

Do not think that God Himself is partial and subject to feelings of love and hatred. It simply means that egoism is a great obstacle to the realization of God-consciousness. The more the ego is emptied, the more the heart will be filled with God. The grace of God is always there. Only the ego prevents man from taking advantage of it. For those who are proud of their wealth, position, learning or birth, spiritual discipline cannot come and they cannot realize God. They

are myopic or short-sighted. Wealth is more a barrier than an aid to spirituality.

What is the difference between ‘my will’ and ‘God’s will’?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is no difference between your will and God’s will to begin with. There is only the covering of ego, the ‘I’ identity. Due to the predominant nature of the ‘I’ identity one thinks, “This is my will” and “That is God’s will.” When one is in a rajasic or dominant mood, then it seems to be one’s own will. When one is in a sattwic or peaceful mood, it is God’s will. When one is in a tamasic mood, there is no will, nothing. Frankly speaking, this is the only difference between ‘my will’ and ‘God’s will’.

Naturally, one tries to analyze it from one’s perspective by saying, “I have a nature, I have a personality, I have my needs, I live in a situation, in an environment.” One creates a reason to confirm the guna which is predominant and to give logic to one’s will. This confirmation and this logic also come from the same guna.

When one is angry with somebody for having said or done something, one tries to project oneself as a strong person and dominate the other person with one’s presence, attitude, thoughts or ideas. What are people projecting? They are projecting their rajoguna quality. When they are at peace with themselves, what are they projecting? What are they radiating? They are radiating the sattwaguna quality. When they are at peace with themselves, they will realize that there is no difference between their will and God’s will, for they no longer exist as an identity. The barrier of ego is removed.

Only when the ego has to assert itself does it become ‘my will’, but when the ego is at peace with itself, it is God’s will.

How does seva destroy one’s ego?

Swami Sivananda: Many of your actions may be selfish in the beginning. It does not matter. You should not be discouraged on this score. Slowly, when you grow in purity, some of your

actions will turn out to be unselfish. In the long run all your actions will be unselfish. If you work hard in the field of seva for two years, then five actions out of a hundred will be unselfish and ninety-five will be selfish. After some years of incessant struggle, fifty actions out of a hundred will be unselfish and pure. Keep the ideal in front of you daily.

Work patiently with indefatigable energy. You have to destroy your old mind full of selfishness and build a new mind of selflessness. This is doubtless uphill work. It demands struggle and constant effort with assiduous patience and iron determination. Serve, love, give and live to serve others.

When the heart is not yet free of impurities and the lower nature rid of its dross, how can spiritual experience come to you? Therefore, first root out egoism, anger, hatred and greed by sincere selfless service. Even if you manage to do a little good to ten human beings, if you succeed in destroying one negative trait completely and develop fully a single positive virtue, feel certain that your life has not been lived in vain. Even this, ten people in a million hardly ever achieve. Apply yourself heart and soul to seva.

Look at the stupendous and magnanimous work turned out by Buddha, Shankara and others. Can you attribute an iota of selfish motive to their actions? They lived to serve others. Think: “The whole universe is my home. I will use my mind, senses, prana and body as instruments for the wellbeing of the world.”

How can one discriminate between ego-centred love and self-centred devotion?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti implies that one feels devotion. From this comes effacement of ego and from this comes expanded awareness. Usually love and devotion are associated with and dependent on reciprocation – one loves and expects love in return. This is ego-centred love, not bhakti. Bhakti is love that expects no return. Bhakti means not taking, but giving.

As one treads the path of bhakti yoga, self-interest automatically starts to fade. There is a transformation into giving and more giving. Devotion increases as the awareness of the bhakta increases, as he recognizes and progressively removes his limitations and imperfections. The feeling of bhakti is intensified. The level of awareness is correspondingly intensified and the greater the level of bhakti, the less the ego. The aim is to reach a point where there is total identification with the object of worship.

Once bhakti starts to affect the heart, every experience becomes a lesson, a means to reduce pride and the power of the ego. It is easy to attain some kind of success in something, work or study, and think, "What a clever person I am." The ego is so easily inflated, but it is a strange thing that when one feels egotistical, there quickly occurs something which deflates the ego. That is, while one is wallowing in a feeling of ego pride, something generally happens to highlight this false sense of pride so that one realizes how the ego was playing games and how it overpowered one's being. On the path of bhakti yoga something always seems to occur to prevent this ego complacency. This is the grace of being a bhakta, even if only slightly. This is the way events seem to flow, continually knocking the bottom out of egotistical mental status.

Pride must be one of the greatest obstacles on the path to expanded awareness. There is a wonderful and practical book called *The Dark Night of the Soul*, which deals with this subject in great detail. It was written by the Christian mystic, Saint John of the Cross. He says that aspirants have to pass through the so-called 'dark night of the soul'. As they gain some experience they become greedy for more. They become egotistical or think themselves more advanced spiritually than other people. They are caught in many ego traps. These are blocks to expanded awareness, and they occur in this so-called 'dark night of the soul', where one's imperfections are purged.

When the ego is surrendered does a bhakta become an instrument of the divine will?

Swami Sivananda: Effort is necessary only as long as the ego or the feeling of separateness persists. When these are removed and when the Light of the Divine has descended into the devotee, he puts forth no more effort. This is confirmed by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:59):

*Vishayaa vinivartante niraahaarasya dehinah;
Rasavarjam raso'pyasya param drishtvaa nivartate.*

The objects of the senses turn away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind, but his longing also turns away upon seeing the Supreme.

There is no desiring or craving because there is no ego. The devotee is filled with divine love and therefore feels no want. Desire exists only so long as the ego or the sense of separateness with its concomitant imperfection exists. When this state is transcended in para bhakti, all desires come to an end and find their fulfilment in the Divine. Compared to the invaluable treasure of divine love, the wealth of the three worlds appears to be a straw in the eyes of the bhakta, not to speak of motor cars, houses, name, fame or other worldly possessions. The sum total of all the pleasures of the universe is like a drop when compared to the ocean of bliss, or God, who is the source of these pleasures. Nothing tempts the bhakta who has attained His Love. As one who receives nectar to drink will not be tempted to drink from a muddy pool of water, so also a devotee who has that supreme bhakti will not hanker after anything whatsoever.

When the devotee has attained eternal satisfaction in His Love, the impulse to attain something else disappears and with it the desire to perform actions to achieve personal gain. Only as long as there is a sense of imperfection can there be a motive for action. In divine love the bhakta achieves perfection. He sees God in all, and all in God. Therefore, he ceases to perform actions of his own volition. A similar idea is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:17):

*Yo na hrishyati na dveshti na shochati na kaankshati;
Shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaanyah sa me priyah.*

He who neither rejoices nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing good and evil, full of devotion, he is dear to Me.

Thenceforward, he becomes the instrument of God; he performs actions without desire or attachment, in accordance with His Will for the wellbeing of the whole world.

What happens when the ego dissolves?

Swami Satyananda: Through this process of realization, when the ego begins to diminish one may not see God, but will certainly begin to perceive the divine will, and then one knows that one has come slightly closer to God. The distance remains, but it will diminish by and by, kilometre by kilometre. One day the gap will close and one will merge with God. However, I do not want to become one with God. I want to continue to see Him and for Him to continue to see me. Once I merge into God it will not be so enjoyable.

The enjoyment is in *dvaita*, duality. When one is separate from God, one enjoys it, but when one meets Him and merges in Him, where is the bliss? Then there is no definition of bliss. This difference, this *bheda bhakti*, is a sutra of bhakti marga. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, Garuda asks Kakabhushundi:

O dear one, tell me everything
And explain how you got your present body.

Kakabhushundi replies:

Austerity, yajna, control of mind and senses,
Charity, non-attachment, discrimination,
Yoga and true knowledge
Are the fruits of devotion to Rama's feet,
Without which none can enjoy permanent security.
It was in this body that I was blessed

With devotion to Rama,
So I have a special liking for this body.

He says devotion to Sri Rama was awakened in the heart of that particular body.

On that account, O Master,
This form is extremely dear to me.
Although my death depends on my will,
Still I do not quit this body,
For, according to the Vedas,
Remembrance of the Lord is not possible
Without a physical body.

Therefore, throw off the desires and just submit everything to the divine will. Whether there is pain or happiness, one is in His hands.

I discovered this suddenly because the ego melted. I realized that whatever I am is because of Him. What I did was because of Him. What I received was because of Him. In the future, whatever happens will be according to His wish. Only after the dissolution of this ego did the path become slightly visible. When the ego is present, one presumes one is the absolute doer and has to suffer the consequences accordingly, good as well as bad.

It was fortuitous that this happened to me, because this process generally does not happen to people of my type. This realization generally happens to those who have been unsuccessful in life. I have had one success after another. I never faced hardships. Whatever project I touched was successful. For a person who has always been successful without much endeavour, to develop an inflated ego would not have been surprising. However, every time I was successful in my life, I disowned my connection. I kept detaching myself from those areas of my life in which I was successful.

Why is it true when the scriptures say: Things happen on their own, there is nothing in the hands of man?

Swami Satyananda: That is absolutely true. Look at how the administration of this huge creation is running. The seasons arrive on time and leave on time. Everything is governed. There are no faults anywhere. There is perfection and accuracy everywhere. It can be foretold at what time a lunar eclipse will occur fifty thousand years from now, for the laws are immutable. The law of the world is fixed, formed since eternity, and everything is running according to that. The small human being is caught up in his individual ego! People believe that they can do things when in fact it is God who does everything and gets everything done, who inspires life. He sits in one's heart and moves one like a puppeteer moves a puppet. God holds the strings.

BHAKTI YOGA OF ACHARYA RAMANUJAN

What was Ramanujan's philosophy of bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: Ramanujan (1017–1130) was born in a village near Madras. He was a brilliant student. At about the end of the tenth century, the Visishtadvaita system of philosophy was well established in South India and the followers of this creed were in charge of important Vaishnavite temples at Kanchipuram, Srirangam, Tirupathi and other places.

Ramanujan was the exponent of the *Visishtadvaita* philosophy, or qualified non-dualism. Ramanujan's Brahman is *sa-visesha Brahman*, Brahman with attributes. According to Ramanujan's teachings, Narayana is the Supreme Being, the individual soul is *chit* and matter is *achit*. Ramanujan regards the attributes as real and permanent, but subject to the control of Brahman. The attributes are called *prakaras* or modes. Narayana is the Ruler and Lord of the universe. The jiva is His servant and worshipper. The jiva should completely surrender himself to the Divine. The oneness of God is quite consistent with the existence of attributes,

as the attributes or *shaktis* depend upon God for their existence.

Ramanujan travelled throughout the length and breadth of India to disseminate the path of devotion. He visited all the sacred places, including Kashi, Kashmir and Badrinath. He finally settled in Srirangam in South India and continued his labours of preaching the Visishtadvaita philosophy and writing books. Thousands of people flocked to him every day to hear his lectures. He had a congregation of seven hundred sannyasins, seventy-four dignitaries who held special offices of ministry, and thousands of holy men and women who revered him as God. He converted lakhs of people to the path of bhakti.

How did Ramanujan want to help people through mantra?

Swami Sivananda: When Ramanujan took initiation of the sacred mantra *Om Namō Narayanaya*, his guru, Nambi, told him, “Ramanujan, keep this mantra secret. This mantra is powerful. Those who repeat this mantra will attain salvation. Give it only to a worthy disciple previously tried.” However, Ramanujan had a large heart. He was extremely compassionate and his love for humanity was unbounded. He wanted that every man should enjoy the eternal bliss of Narayana. He immediately called all the people, irrespective of caste and creed, to assemble before the temple. He stood on top of the tower above the front gate of the temple and shouted out the sacred mantra to all of them at the top of his voice. Nambi, his guru, came to know of this and became furious. Ramanujan said, “O my beloved guru! Please prescribe a suitable punishment for my wrong action. I will gladly suffer the tortures of hell myself if millions of people could get salvation by hearing the mantra through me.”

Which eleven points have been prescribed by Sri Ramanujan for developing bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: What is necessary to ascend to the state of bhakti is all-round spiritual discipline. This may be

achieved by following the eleven fundamental factors which Sri Ramanujan had prescribed. They are: *abhyasa* or practice of continuous thinking of God; *viveka* or discrimination; *vimoka* or freedom from all else except the longing for God; *satyam* or truthfulness; *arjavam* or straightforwardness; *kriya* or doing good to others; *kalyana* or wishing well to all; *daya* or compassion; *ahimsa* or non-injury; *daan* or giving; and *anavasada* or cheerfulness and optimism.

1. *Abhyasa* or practice is sustained and persistent effort to achieve mastery over a certain thing. Through continued practice the aspirant tries to secure the steadiness of mind, to restrain all its external vrittis, thereby converging them on only one object, the Divine. Through persistent abhyasa, he checks the outgoing tendencies of the mind and directs them inward, constantly dwelling in and meditating on the higher reality.
2. *Viveka* or discrimination enables him to choose between right and wrong, and to follow and adhere to what is right. How does he discriminate between the right and the wrong? That which elevates and takes him nearer to his ideal, that which brings him joy and peace, he considers as right and acts in accordance with. That which pricks his conscience, brings him depression, pain and restlessness, that which drags him down from goodness and takes him away from the divine source, he considers as wrong, abstains from and guards himself against its influence. He also discriminates between sattvic food and rajasic and tamasic food. Thus he perseveres and strives to reach his goal, following the path of righteousness.
3. *Vimoka* is longing for God alone and renunciation of everything that does not accelerate progress on the path. One must renounce what is earthly if one wishes to attain that which is eternal, permanent and infinite. The aspirant must renounce all his desires and cravings for material objects; he must renounce the negative patterns of the mind through introspection and correct exertion. Only then can he develop true longing for God, only then

can he proceed Godwards. You cannot drink two things at the same time in the same cup. If you wish to progress on the spiritual journey, then it is necessary to give up all that is not conducive to the progress. This is the secret. To want nothing is the greatest and most efficacious way to attain the keenest longing for God.

4. *Satyam* or truthfulness is surely the prime requirement in sadhana. God is truth. Therefore, to realize Him, you must become the very embodiment of truth. You have to live the truth, you should think of truth alone, you should speak truth alone and do what is right and be true to your conscience.
5. *Arjavam* is straightforwardness or honesty. There is no place for deceit, crookedness or falsehood in the quest for God. God neither wants your riches nor your intellect, but only a pure, truthful heart shorn of deceit, shallowness and hypocrisy. There is nothing to hide from him, for he is the all-knowing, all-pervading Spirit. Your heart must be as pure as the white snow and as clear as crystal. Just as you cannot see a reflection in a corrugated, dust-coated mirror, even so, if your heart is cobwebbed by selfish desires and dishonesty, and corrugated by hypocrisy and crookedness, you can hardly know the real nature of God. The sadhaka must cultivate a heart like that of a child.
6. *Kriya* or doing good to others comes next. As a true devotee you should behold Him in all, for He is the manifest form in whatever you perceive. The sadhaka's foremost duty is to do good and serve others, irrespective of any distinction or personal consideration. Serving and helping those in distress opens your eyes to the sorrow of human life. You begin to understand the painful nature of worldly existence. The stony, selfish heart learns to feel for others. Then compassion, mercy and love nurture in your heart. Your heart becomes purified and vairagya dawns.
7. *Kalyana* or wishing well to others is another necessary qualification of a devotee. With a pure, loving heart,

pray for the good and well-being of others. You should not entertain any grudge or ill-feeling towards even your opponents, but wish them all that is good and auspicious. This is the true spirit of a devotee.

8. *Daya* or compassion comes next. God is love. He is all-merciful and compassion personified, and as you seek to realize Him, you need to become a veritable ocean of love and mercy. You must cultivate a heart as broad as the infinite sky.
9. All the divine virtues that are necessary for one's evolution have their origin in *ahimsa* or non-injury. Ahimsa is a life-giving force. Ill-will, hatred, anger and malice cannot stand before its mighty potency. It is a special attribute of the soul. The practice of ahimsa eventually culminates in the realization of unity and oneness of life. It generates the feeling of universal brotherhood and cosmic love.
10. Next is *daan* or giving. Abundant, spontaneous generosity with a pure heart for relieving the suffering of the distressed is a potent means to elevate the heart and to destroy its shallowness and impurities. You must have a large heart. The more you give, the more will come to you. This is the law of nature.
11. *Anvasada* is cheerfulness and hope. This is an essential quality that a devotee must try to cultivate. There is no room for depression on the spiritual path. You must be optimistic, zealous and persevering. There are many active forces that will oppose your progress and actually assail and pull you down. But you must not lose your hope or be depressed. You have to brave the storms and proceed in spite of the difficulties and adverse conditions that try to cow you down and push you off the path of sadhana. With cheerful perseverance and optimistic zeal, relying on the inner self, you should proceed with sadhana. Ultimately, success will be yours.

SWAMI SIVANANDA'S SONG OF 18 ITIES

Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity,
Sincerity, simplicity, veracity,
Equanimity, fixity, non-irritability,
Adaptability, humility, tenacity,
Integrity, nobility, magnanimity,
Charity, generosity, purity.

Practise daily these eighteen ITIES,
You will soon attain immortality.
Brahman is the only real entity,
Mr So and So is a false non-entity.
You will abide in eternity and infinity;
You will behold unity in diversity;
You cannot attain this in the university.
But you can attain this in the Forest University,
But you can attain this in the ashram in Rishikesh.

What is the purpose of the 18 ITIES?

Swami Niranjanananda: The final outcome of yoga is not isolating oneself from the world, but involving oneself more deeply in the affairs of the world, knowing one's place in it, one's duties, and how one can make a difference in other people's lives. This is what Swami Sivananda called the 'divine life'. As one follows the yoga of Swami Sivananda, the gross nature is transformed. As one becomes more sattwic, more mature in wisdom and develops greater understanding, there is deeper identification with the environment and the world.

Transformation of a conditioned nature into a flowering nature is the 'divine life' described by Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda said that one should be able to express yoga in one's normal environment. For this to happen, the yogic concepts have to be ingrained in one's life. After all, a computer will function only according to its programming, its software. Therefore, one has to replace the software inside, upgrade the programming of the mind. Where does

one find such software? Where does one find a programme that allows one to change one's computer's performance? That possibility is seen in the 18 ITIES of Swami Sivananda.

The ITIES are the attempt to fill life with positive and beautiful qualities. Working with the ITIES is about cultivating positive habits. The 18 ITIES are *sankalpas*, positive resolutions one makes to become a better person. When one builds the positive dimension of one's nature, one becomes pure within, which enables one to enter the transcendental experience of life, the divine life.

Serenity

Swami Sivananda: Serenity is the foundation of the other ITIES. Living the teaching of the following prayer gives serenity:

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

Be tranquil within, let that inner peace and joy radiate through a serene countenance. A serene countenance is peaceful, smiling and serious, and does not show any violent emotions. A serene mind is a valuable spiritual asset, and for this the world is a wonderful training ground.

Swami Niranjanananda: The first ITY is serenity. It is the first change in the software. It has been said that serenity arises when one lets go of one's mental and emotional reactions. When one is serene, one is at peace with oneself.

Serenity is an experience of an integrated personality. However, most people do not have an integrated personality and therefore they are not serene.

People do not see themselves as they are. They think the appearance is real. They beautify the appearance, and when it looks good, they feel good. There are two areas of experience. One is appearance, the other is reality. People

are always identifying and concerned with appearance, not reality.

Serenity is finding the reality and not being caught up in the apparent reality and its reactions. Therefore, in order to live serenely, one has to be free from the mental and emotional responses and reactions. As one disassociates more and more from results and expectations from work and other selfish attitudes, one identifies more with one's creative nature, with peace within and one attains serenity.

Regularity

Swami Sivananda: Be regular in your daily habits, in your work and spiritual practices. Get up at a particular time. Be clock-like in your daily activities. You will be free from worry, fear, anxiety, haphazard and shabby work. You will do the right thing at the right moment.

Swami Satyananda: In the scheme of spiritual life, the amount of practice is not as important as the regularity of the practice. As long as you are regular in your yoga practices, even if you only devote a minimum period of time to them, you will definitely travel far into your inner self.

Swami Niranjanananda: Regularity indicates a positive and stable mind. When the mind is unstable we are irregular. When the mind is left alone to behave like a monkey, irregularity sets in, but when the mind is encouraged to become stable and fixed, regularity comes about.

Absence of vanity

Swami Sivananda: Do not boast of your birth, position, qualifications and spiritual attainments. Praise others, see good in all, treat even the lowliest creatures as your equal and with respect.

Swami Satyananda: Three things one should not speak about: how much money we have, our good birth and spiritual powers.

Swami Niranjanananda: If one can be one's natural self, one has overcome one's vanities. The moment one tries to project oneself as either an over-confident or under-confident person, one submits to vanities. Humility is the antidote to vanity. If one can become humble in all situations, one will overcome vanity.

Sincerity

Swami Sivananda: Let your words agree with your thoughts. Let your actions agree with your words. Let there be harmony among your thoughts, words and actions.

Sincerity is one of the most important qualifications on the spiritual path. Sincerity is honesty of mind. It is speaking as you think, doing as you pretend and profess, performing and making good what you promise and really being what you would seem and appear to be.

Swami Satyananda: It is better to aspire for sincerity in word, thought and deed before aspiring for success in sadhana. Besides, there is only one secret of meeting the challenges of life. One has to be sincere and one has to be innocent.

Swami Niranjanananda: Sincerity is an important sadhana and attitude to be cultivated. It is not a superficial question to ask, "Am I sincere with myself?" Sincerity requires purity and innocence of heart.

Simplicity

Swami Sivananda: Be artless. Be simple in your speech. Do not twist words and topics. Be plain. Avoid diplomacy, cunningness and crookedness. Be simple in your dress. Be simple in your food. Speak simply in short sentences.

Swami Satyananda: If everyone wished for poverty, the world would be heaven. Everybody is trying to be wealthy, but the great saints have said that one has to live a life of

self-imposed poverty. Actually, the word poverty should be replaced by the word simplicity. Simplicity in life is living exactly in accordance with your necessities and means.

Swami Niranjanananda: Simplicity is getting rid of the unnecessary and complicated pretences in life, and learning to become uncomplicated.

Veracity

Swami Sivananda: Be truthful. Stick to your promises. Do not exaggerate. Do not twist facts. Think twice before you speak. Speak truthfully. Speak sweetly. Be precise in what you say.

Swami Satyananda: Check up on your statements and actions and, as an accounts clerk tallies his daily expense sheet, find out how much truth you have invested in your conduct.

Swami Niranjanananda: Truth is diplomacy. Not crooked or political diplomacy, instead a diplomacy that arises out of knowing how words can influence another person's mind.

Equanimity

Swami Sivananda: Be calm, bear insult patiently, bear injury, suffering, failures and disrespect calmly. Do not be elated by praise, pleasure, success and honour. Look upon both with equal vision. Behave alike towards friends and foes. Never let anything disturb your inner peace.

Swami Satyananda: The innermost part of one's personality is full of illumination, full of knowledge, full of peace and full of bliss. Those who know how to get there, at least for a few seconds every day, know how to maintain peace, tranquillity, equanimity and strength in their lives.

Swami Niranjanananda: Equanimity is being even-tempered, even in extreme situations. It is being balanced in heat and cold, in happiness and suffering. One who travels the path

with clarity, who is not influenced by opposites and is not ruffled, is a balanced person.

Fixity

Swami Sivananda: One cannot achieve anything if one is fickle-minded. Choosing one's goal or ideal one should always remember it.

Swami Satyananda: One should have living faith in higher things. One should have an aim. This is very important. The moment one loses faith and forgets the aim, one succumbs to anger, jealousy, greed, passion or delusion.

Swami Niranjanananda: Fixity is being stable and constant, one-pointed. It is an attitude of total identification and merging with the object of contemplation. When one only sees the aim, and focuses on that, the world disappears and only one and the aim remain.

Non-irritability

Swami Sivananda: Irritability is the precursor of violent outbursts of anger. Watch carefully for the disturbance in the mental equilibrium. Watch for the ripples of anger that might rise in the lake of the mind. Quell them then and there; do not allow them to assume greater proportions. Then you will attain peace.

Swami Satyananda: A positive thought always overcomes a negative one. This is the natural law. When the sun rises, fog vanishes. When the light is switched on, darkness vanishes. If one cultivates divine virtuous qualities, the evil qualities disappear. Courage gets rid of fear, patience overcomes anger and irritability, love overcomes hatred, and purity overcomes passion. Therefore the advice is: Be softer than a blade of grass, more patient than a tree, and more tolerant than the earth.

Swami Niranjanananda: Non-irritability means not to be annoyed or irritated. It means to cultivate patience and tolerance, not just with others but with oneself too.

Adaptability

Swami Sivananda: One has to understand well the nature of people with whom one comes into contact. The approach to them has to be adjusted in such a way as to be pleasing to them. Eccentricities of others should be borne with joyfully, and one should always react in a harmonious manner.

Swami Satyananda: Abuses, insults, injuries, taunts, harassments and discomforts have all strengthened my personality. Let me repeat the mantra which my guru whispered into my ear: “Adapt, adjust, accommodate; bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest sadhana.”

Swami Niranjanananda: If one is sitting in a boat being rocked by big waves, one has to move one’s body to the movement of the boat. If one sits rigidly, one may tumble over. This is how adaptability and adjustment has to take place in every situation.

Humility

Swami Sivananda: Respect everybody. Bow with folded hands before all. Do not talk in a loud voice before elders and venerable persons. See God in all and feel that you are His servant and so the servant of all. Consider none as inferior to you.

Swami Satyananda: One has to interact with society, family and friends in a tender and humble way.

Swami Niranjanananda: The key to humility is consideration. When one is able to develop the faculty of consideration, then a natural attitude of respect develops within us, which takes us to humility.

Tenacity

Swami Sivananda: Tenacity is the natural friend of fixity. Once one has fixed the aim and chosen the path, one has to stick to it without compromise on one's fundamental principles, saying: "I may give up my life, but I will not swerve from the path. I will not break my vows."

Swami Satyananda: An alert driver who is clear about his destiny and is able to command and steer his senses is bound to attain his goal. One may know everything, learn everything, accept everything; but mind is one, goal is one, spirit is one, direction is one.

Swami Niranjanananda: Tenacity is holding firmly onto one's beliefs, which means having a clear mind. Normally, one does not hold on to one's beliefs, one holds on to a conditioning. The conditionings can be convictions, nevertheless, it is a conditioning. That is what has to change, so that with the true state of expanded awareness, one can discriminate between the appropriate and the inappropriate, and maintain the appropriate belief.

Integrity

Swami Sivananda: Develop an integral personality. Tie all the loose ends in your character. Become a man of high moral principles. Lead a life of righteousness. Everyone will trust you, obey you, respect you and revere you.

Swami Satyananda: Creativity means to give the best of one's personality, and this is only possible if one has self-discipline. Discipline does not mean cruelty. It is a compassionate life of integration.

Swami Niranjanananda: Integrity is trying to bring together the fractured personality.

Nobility

Swami Sivananda: Shun mean-mindedness as dung and poison. Never look into the defects of others. Always appreciate the good qualities of everyone. Be dignified in bearing. Never stoop to ignoble thoughts, words or actions.

Swami Satyananda: The self is noble and great. One has inherited truth, purity, and within are infinite capacities.

Swami Niranjanananda: Nobility represents a high, good and refined character.

Magnanimity

Swami Sivananda: Take a broad view of things. Ignore the faults of others. Be great and noble-minded in whatever you do. Avoid silly talk and childish prattle. Let not the mind dwell on little and insignificant things.

Swami Satyananda: One is born as a human being in order to realize the depth and the heights of consciousness, the magnanimity of the soul within.

Swami Niranjanananda: Magnanimity is generosity and the ability to forgive.

Charity

Swami Sivananda: Give, give and give, this is the secret of abundance. Radiate thoughts of goodness and love. Forgive the faults of others. Bless the man that injures you. Share what you have with others. Disseminate spiritual knowledge to one and all. Use the material wealth, knowledge and spiritual wisdom that you possess as a divine trust.

Swami Satyananda: All property has three destinations: offering, enjoyment and destruction. It may be enjoyed or offered, otherwise, it will be lost or destroyed. How much does one need for one's own enjoyment? What is not

needed must be given to those who have nothing. God gives prosperity so that it may be given to others. He makes one an agent, a medium. Never should a poor beggar at the gate be refused. He has the same soul. The light inside the beggar is the same light that is in everyone.

Swami Niranjanananda: Charity is helping others to overcome their needs.

Generosity

Swami Sivananda: In whatever you give, be liberal. Have a large heart. Do not be miserly. Take delight in the joy of others, in making them happy. Generosity is a sister virtue of charity and is the fulfilment of charity, magnanimity and nobility.

Swami Satyananda: If one wants to please God, one must be generous to others. One does not have to go to a temple, church or mosque. One does not have to become a swami or yogi. One does not have to practise asana, pranayama, or meditation, but one should do whatever one can to relieve the pain of those who are in distress. Real help means enabling people to generate their own strength and ability.

Swami Niranjanananda: Generosity is sharing and making others happy.

Purity

Swami Sivananda: Be pure at heart. Eradicate lust, anger and greed. Be pure in your thoughts. Think of God always. Think of the wellbeing of all. Be pure in your words; never utter harsh, unkind words. Be pure in body; keep it clean and healthy. Let the dress and surroundings be clean; observe the rules of physical, moral and spiritual hygiene.

Swami Satyananda: To err is human; it is willed by the divine force. It yields a fine reward if only one does not repeat the

old mistake. Can one imagine a lotus without mud, a pearl without an oyster? From mistakes comes immense purity.

Swami Niranjanananda: Purity is the culmination of perfection, when all the dimensions of the personality merge into one, and when the state of being in complete harmony with oneself and the cosmos is experienced.

VIRTUES AND GODLY QUALITIES

Is there an easy way to understand how to live godly qualities?

Swami Sivananda: Spiritualize all your activities. Let your eyes look with kindness, your tongue speak with sweetness, your hands touch with softness.

What are the qualities of a bhakta according to Sri Krishna?

Swami Niranjanananda: In Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna asks, “Can you tell me how an aspirant who has established himself in the Supreme Consciousness expresses his nature, mentality, feelings and emotions?” In answer to that, Sri Krishna describes the aspirant in eight slokas (12:13 to 20):

*Adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankaarah samaduhkhasukhah kshamee.*

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayah;
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

*Yasmaannodwijate loka lokaannodwijate cha yah;
Harshaamarshabhayodwegairmukto yah sa cha me priyah.*

*Anapekshah shuchirdaksha udaaseeno gatavyathah;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee yo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

*Yona hrishyati na dweshati na shochati na kaangkshati;
Shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaan yah sa me priyah.*

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhaduhksheshu samah sangavivarjitah.*

*Tulyanindaastutirmaunee santushto yena kenachit:
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaan me priyo narah.*

*Ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate;
Shraddhadhaanaah matparamaa bhaktaaste'teeva me priyaah.*

He who is free from hatred, friendly and compassionate towards all beings, without 'mineness' and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving,

Ever content and united with Me, self-controlled, having firm resolve, with mind and intellect surrendered to Me, that devotee of Mine is dear to Me.

He who is not a source of agitation for the world, nor is agitated by the world, who is free from exhilaration and anger, fear and anxiety, is dear to Me.

He who is free from wants, pure, clever, impartial and above distractions, who renounces doership in all actions, that devotee is dear to Me.

He who neither rejoices nor hates, grieves nor desires, who renounces good and evil and is full of devotion, is dear to Me.

He who is the same with foe and friend, in honour and dishonour, the same in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, and is free from attachment,

To whom praise and reproach are equal, who is silently contemplative, content with anything, unattached to home, steady-minded and full of devotion, that person is dear to Me.

Truly, those who follow this immortal dharma thus declared, endowed with faith, regarding Me as supreme, those devotees are extremely dear to Me. (13–20)

This is the description of a perfect being, a person who has attained the highest realization of transcendental consciousness, and how that person can act, live and be. Sri Krishna talks about the signs of a bhakta. He does not discuss the methods and disciplines of bhakti yoga, instead he talks about how an alert and watchful bhakta behaves.

Purity of emotion leads to realization of the transcendental nature. Through emotion we access our spirit. This idea has been clearly defined in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is on bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga has been called the yoga of devotion, but from Sri Krishna's perspective, bhakti yoga is balance, not devotion, not adoration, not ritual, not worship. Bhakti is finding perfect balance of emotion. In describing the components of a bhakta, he says that a real bhakta is equipoised and not affected by the opposites of pain and pleasure, suffering and contentment.

People translate the word bhakta as devotee, however, in this context *bhakta* means a person who has attained inner realization, inner union. In Chapter 12, verses 13 to 20, every description given indicates that one has to attain emotional balance. Once emotional balance is attained, realization comes, as there is nothing pulling or binding one anywhere anymore. That realization is instantaneous. It is like shining a torchlight in an unexplored cave which has been in darkness for thousands of years. In one second the darkness of centuries will disappear and the cave will be illuminated. Similarly, when balance of emotions is attained, the darkness of the soul is lifted instantaneously and the light of the transcendental nature manifests and illuminates the life process.

Sri Krishna says that only a person who has removed the impurities and darkness from his life is dear to Him. In the *Ramacharitamana*s, Sri Rama says: *Mohi kapat chhal chhidra na bhava* – “I do not like a person who is scheming or deceitful, whose life is sullied. I like a person who has no hostility towards anyone, who sees Me in everyone.” Aversion comes when there is a sense of duality. When the feeling of ‘you’

and 'I' ends and there is experience and worship of only the one element, all hostility ends. Therefore, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna say, "I like a person who is free of hostility, who is friendly and compassionate, who has transcended 'me and mine', who is free of ego, who is able to accept happiness and sorrow with equanimity; one who is not exhilarated by joy nor distracted by sorrow, who can forgive, who is content, who is determined and who has surrendered his mind and intellect to God. That person is dear to Me who has no fear, excitement, jealousy or agitation, who has no expectations of anyone, who is pure, dexterous and indifferent to the world, and who does not ever think of himself as the doer."

Sri Krishna enumerates the qualities of a true devotee in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* so that one may become more aware of oneself, remove the impurities and tamas from one's life, and cultivate purity, luminosity and sattwa. This is also the basic teaching of spiritual life and bhakti yoga.

What are the virtues that a bhakta needs to cultivate?

Swami Sivananda: Just as a plant in a garden is protected from insects and pests and is given sufficient manure for its growth, so also, virtues have to be protected and nourished. It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 78):

*Ahimsaasatyashauchadayaastikyaadi chaarित्रyaani
paripaalaneeyaani.*

Virtues like non-violence, truth, purity, compassion, faith in the Vedas and the existence of God, and other excellences of character should be strictly cultivated and protected.

Here the devotee is asked to practise five special items of conduct. *Daya* is active benevolence. It is the positive expression of love. *Ahimsa* is the negative expression of love. In the practice of truth one must speak exactly what has been seen, heard or understood about a person or a thing. There

should be not the least exaggeration or twisting. The speech should be truthful and sweet. Truth which leads to another's injury is not a desirable thing.

Adi means etc., and Sage Narada intends to point to the other divine qualities such as courage, charity, control of senses, austerity, straightforwardness, humility, self-abnegation, tranquillity, freedom from wrath, tenderness of heart, sobriety, forgiveness and fortitude.

Kabir sums up the qualities of a bhakta in the following saying:

Virtue abides where there is compassion,
Vice where there is greed,
Death where there is wrath,
And the Lord Himself where there is forgiveness.

What is the divine, sattwic nature according to Sri Krishna?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna gives a summarized description of the people endowed with divine qualities (16:1 to 3):

*Abhayam sattvasamshuddhirjnaanayogavyavasthitih;
Daanam damashcha yajnashcha svaadhyaayastapa aarjavam.*

*Ahimsaa satyamakrodhastyaagah shaantirapaishunam;
Dayaa bhootesvaloluptvam maardavam hreerachaapalam.*

*Tejah kshamaa dhritih shauchamadroho naatimaanitaa;
Bhavanti sampadam daiveemabhijaatasya bhaarata.*

Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in jnana and yoga, sattwic charity, sense control, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, tapas and straightforwardness,

Ahimsa, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation of doership, tranquillity, absence of maliciousness, compassion to all, non-attachment when in contact with sense objects, shame for non-righteous acts, restraint from useless actions,

Sublime vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred and pride are (the qualities) of one born for the divine state. (1–3)

What is the use of being good and doing good when goodness is not recognized?

Swami Sivananda: Whether goodness pays well or not from the material standpoint is not relevant. The aspirant should continue to do good and be good always. No doubt the worldly-minded people generally take advantage of such good people as ideal gullibles to carry their wishes through and even to deceive. It matters nothing, for God is always on the side of the good and the righteous who stick to dharma and who rely on Him.

The good person is always spiritually inclined, though he is in the world. To be good is to increase the purity and devotion to God in abundant measure. To do good is to reap good in return. If a good action is done, a sweet fruit in favour of you arises, with the result that you enjoy it whether you want it or not. If a bad action is done, the consequent fruit of action liable to be enjoyed willingly or unwillingly will be bitter and against you. Whether goodness is recognized or not, do good and be good throughout life.

God does recognize and reward always the good people and good actions. He actually lives and moves in them. The good person actually feels God's presence in himself and around without a vestige of doubt. It is a mockery for a man to consider himself good without being able to be conscious of God's presence in him, with him and around him.

What are the qualities of a bhakta?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna has indicated the ultimate attainment of having balanced emotion. How does it make one a better human being? What qualities does it endow one with? How does one live when one becomes a bhakta? Sri Krishna says, "One who is free from malice towards all beings, who is friendly and

compassionate to all, who has gone beyond the sense of 'I and mine' and 'yours and thine', and who is balanced in joy and sorrow, forgiving by nature, ever-contented and internally united with Me, that person is dear to Me."

In describing how this awareness has to develop, Sri Swami Satyananda gives the example of a mother and child. Even though the mother is occupied with her work, she is aware of the child at the same time. She may not be watching the child all the time, yet she is connected with the child. The same connection has to be maintained with God. One continues to live as one has been doing. The only difference is that one's awareness is now connected with the cosmic Self. This connection with the cosmic Self is bhakti.

According to Sri Krishna, a bhakta is one who has subdued the mind, senses and body, who is not distracted and who does not crave enjoyment to stimulate the mind. We are always seeking new forms of enjoyment to feel happy. In this search for happiness the mind is diverted outwards and there is no connection internally. Therefore, one who has a firm resolve, not a wavering resolve, and who has surrendered the mind and reason – 'mind' meaning desires and expectations, 'reason' meaning our justifications for what we are thinking and doing – is a bhakta. One who is both internally and externally pure, clever and impartial, who has gone above distractions and left behind the feeling of doership in all undertakings, knowing that something else is doing it, is a bhakta.

These are the qualifications of a bhakta given in the *Bhagavad Gita*. A bhakta is a person who is in the process of bhakti yoga. Nowhere does it say that every morning one has to do this fire ceremony with this mantra, then this ritual, then that ritual. Bhakti yoga relates to the expressions and behaviours of one's nature, personality and mind. Therefore, it cannot be said that the nine stages of bhakti yoga are to be practised sequentially, as in ashtanga yoga. Acquiring excellence in any one of the nine sadhanas of bhakti yoga, *navada bhakti yoga*, will lead to the experience of bhakti.

How does one become a gardener of one's heart?

Swami Sivananda: By doing wrong actions, one taints one's character. By doing virtuous actions, one develops a noble character. Without character a person falls down to the level of a brute. A person of character is honoured, trusted and adored everywhere. Therefore, one should develop a good character when one is young. One should learn how to eradicate vices and how to cultivate virtues in the garden of one's heart. Vices and negative habits are the weeds. Virtues are priceless fruits and flowers. The yogic method of *pratipaksha bhavana*, cultivation of the opposites, can be learnt and applied in life. Purity or celibacy, forgiveness, generosity, humility and selflessness are the opposites of lust, anger, greed, pride and selfishness. Therefore the aspirant should become a skilful yogic gardener and plant good flowers in the garden of the heart and enthrone the Divine in the centre of the heart-garden and meditate on Him.

How does a bhakta transcend his lower nature?

Swami Sivananda: Passion, anger, greed, moha, pride, jealousy, hatred, egoism, desire for power, name and fame, hypocrisy are obstacles in the way of bhakti yoga. The way is to remove passion by entertaining pure thoughts; anger by love, *kshama*, forgiveness; greed by charity, honesty, disinterestedness; *moha*, attachment, by *viveka*; pride by humility, *namrata* or *vinaya*; jealousy by magnanimity, nobility and *mudita*, friendliness; hatred by love; and egoism by unconditioned, unreserved and ungrudging self-surrender to the Divine, *atmanivedan* or *sharanagati*.

How does Sri Rama describe the qualities of a bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: Sri Rama says in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Aranyakanda, doha 15, chau 6):

*Mama guna gaavata pulaka sareeraa,
Gadagada giraa nayana baha neeraa.*

*Kaama aadi mada dambha na jaake,
Taata nirantara basa mai taake.*

I am always under the control of that person
Who sings My praise with a rejoicing heart,
Whose speech is obstructed by intense joy,
Whose eyes are full of joyful tears,
Who is free from desire, anger and hypocrisy.

What is the purpose of identifying with godly qualities?

Swami Niranjanananda: Jainism has clear definitions of how to know when a person has become *arahant*, enlightened, and what conditions need to be fulfilled. After all, if people say that God is within and can be realized, then upon realization that would make them identify with the godly nature and they would have the same potential as God at a microcosmic, not a macrocosmic level. Therefore, in the second form of bhakti yoga, one identifies with the qualities of the godly nature and they take a place in one's life.

In order to impress somebody, even the most crooked person can behave in a diplomatic and refined manner. In the same way, in order to experience the transcendental nature that same person can adjust and adapt to express a divine quality.

What is a sure way to manage one's ego?

Swami Sivananda: Through the practice of seva alone, one can develop the positive qualities such as tolerance, mercy, kindness, love, patience and self-restraint which are necessary for the practice of bhakti and jnana yoga. How can a cave-dweller in seclusion practise tolerance, mercy and cosmic love? The practice of seva generates, waters and nourishes the positive qualities. Without seva they dwindle and fade away. Seva acts as a brush to keep the mind-mirror ever clean.

How was Swami Sivananda different from other sannyasins?

Swami Satyananda: When you compare the life of Swami Sivananda with the lives of other sannyasins and saints, you find that his was a different personality altogether. He did not behave like a miracle man, a great pontiff or a preacher. He just lived the life of a simple man. It was difficult to change his human qualities. He was a shining example of all the great virtues that one reads about in the books.

How can one still the mind and purify oneself?

Swami Satyananda: Nothing has to be done. Leave everything to God. If He inspires one to think good thoughts, think good thoughts. If He inspires one to think bad thoughts, think bad thoughts. God is the inspirer of every act. Why worry about it? Rather than trying to purify oneself, say, “God, what do You want me to do?” And do it. Leave it to Him and He will do it. Try this trick and everything in life will change.



4

Adherence to the Teachings

The third form of bhakti yoga is adhering to the teachings given by the guru, the enlightened master, with innocence and simplicity, following in his footsteps sincerely without superimposing one's own ideas and beliefs upon the teachings one has received. When one tries to adjust and accommodate the teachings to suit one's own needs, then the teachings become irrelevant. However, when the teaching is taken in the spirit of learning, to improve the quality of life, it becomes a relevant personal philosophy, a way of life.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

PADASEVANAM – SERVING HUMANITY

What is the secret of seva?

Swami Sivananda: Seva is the salt of life. The more energy you spend in elevating and serving others, the more divine energy will flow to you. The secret of attaining God-realization is serving humanity. For a realized soul, this is an urge born out of compassion for his fellow beings. Service always elevates and makes a person divine.

What is seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Seva* is acting with faith and compassion. That is what one offers, by changing one's attitude, managing one's expectations and coming out of the self-centred approach and connecting with other people with the strength of compassion. Compassion has to be practical. It must have wisdom and understanding. This aspect of bhakti is making one free from maliciousness and developing *sat bhava*, the feeling or sentiment based on truth, compassion and the actual situation in which one lives.

Seva, service, is becoming involved in the welfare of other people. Seva is without ego involvement and without expectation. Karma yoga is practised to develop immunity from the karmas. Through seva, one simply improves oneself. If the aspirant develops the idea that the involvement with karma is not for his gain but for a greater purpose and he is offering his seva, he develops immunity to the effect of the karma.

Seva is not only the outer act being performed to help somebody, but also keeping the mind free from natural responses and reactions to a situation. This is the understanding of karma yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita* according to Sri Krishna. One definition of karma yoga is (5:11):

Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaa' atmashuddhaye.

The yogi does all his actions devoid of attachment, for self-purification alone.

When this becomes the purpose of action, or when the two components become involved in action, it becomes karma yoga. Another definition of karma yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita* is (2:48):

*Yogasthah kuru karmaani sangam tyaktvaa dhananjaya;
Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhootvaa samatvam yoga uchyat.*

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is the highest yoga.

This idea has been taken forward in bhakti, where actions become seva. Action plus humility equals seva. Action minus expectation equals karma yoga.

What is padasevanam?

Swami Satyananda: Devotion can be experienced within the mind and in action. One can go on thinking about one's beloved all the time or one can work for him. A mother need not repeat the name of her child all the time, but she is cooking, living, shopping and working for him. That is also called devotion. One should think about God because it gives peace of mind, but one must convert this devotion into active performance to work for the whole of humanity. This is called practical bhakti. This bhakti improves the quality of this existence and will give one a better existence later.

How can one understand seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is no word in English that really defines seva. Service is not seva. Seva is serving and helping others with compassion; serving not for personal gratification but to uplift others. Seva is not meeting one's own aims; it is offering that service as *homa*, an offering in the yajna of life. Seva contains the best there is in each one. When it is offered to another being and it contains one's best thoughts and feelings, one's love and affection, sympathy and compassion, that action becomes a blessing to uplift another being. That is seva.

What is the principle behind padasevanam in spiritual life?

Swami Sivananda: Doing service purifies the heart. Egoism, hatred, jealousy, the idea of superiority and all the kindred negative qualities will vanish. Humility, pure love, sympathy, tolerance and mercy will be developed. The sense of separateness will be annihilated. Selfishness will be eradicated. One will have a broad and liberal outlook on life and begin to feel oneness and unity. One will feel unbounded joy.

What is society after all? It is nothing but a collection of units or individuals. The world is nothing but a manifestation of God. Serving humanity and the country is in fact nothing short of serving God. Service is worship, but only one who serves with bhava can have quick realization and purification of the heart.

The sense of separateness is a colossal fetter. Kill this sense of separateness through Brahma bhavana, by developing advaitic unity of consciousness and by means of selfless service. This sense of separateness is an illusion created by ignorance or maya.

How can seva benefit the aspirant?

Swami Satyananda: In the seventy-five years of my life it has been my experience that one must act for the benefit of others. I have lived by the idea that my money is not mine; I will only spend as much as is necessary. In all these years I have never bought myself a wristwatch. I could have bought myself the best had I so desired, but I have believed that no, first I will buy for another. When I started to apply this principle at first, it was a little blurred around the edges, but it is becoming clearer now. As it becomes clearer, a light will gradually begin to shine within me. I have been the one most benefited by this principle.

Neither sannyasa nor pilgrimages have benefited me as much, nor has reading the scriptures or practising yoga. I have decided that I will live only for others and I say that every person should do the same. I say this to everyone: allocate a part of your earning to the poor and the needy. If fifty saris are brought to your home, then keep aside two for some poor person. If you have eight or ten pairs of shoes, take out two pairs for a poor person. If you have ten tolas of gold, then give a tola for a poor girl's wedding. If you give all ten away, that is even better. Then the whole problem is solved. For that, you have to be large-hearted.

What is the place of love, service and humility in the life of a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: Service is a natural expression of love. Cosmic love expressed through untiring, dynamic selfless service expands the heart and widens the vision. One can conquer the whole world through love, humility and service.

A special power from God comes to those who have a pure and steady love of humanity. Selfless service can reveal to you the identity of humanity. It can expand your heart and take you to the door of intuition. To serve humanity with love is to be in union with the cosmic consciousness.

What is necessary to make the world a better place?

Swami Satyananda: No man earns all by himself, he earns because of society. If this society did not exist, then I could not earn either. We are all indebted to society. Whatever we possess today really belongs to society. Society has as much right to it as you. This thought came to me here and gradually it has become clearer. That is why I am gathering only such people around me who will live for others. I do not care if you are a sannyasin or a householder, married or unmarried, young or old. Only live for others. Eat twice a day and work for others. I don't have any other requirements. I do not want followers. I want a person who can live not for himself, but for others.

How can one apply seva in a practical way?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone in the world lives for himself, but who lives for others? Whatever one earns is spent only on one's wife and children, friends and relatives. If every person contributes a grain of sand, it will help to build the bridge, the way the squirrels built the bridge to Lanka for Sri Rama and his army. It is not necessary to donate one or two million rupees, to give thousands of saris or build a great palace. If every person lights just one candle it will dispel the darkness. Each and every person should involve himself in such work bearing this sentiment in mind.

The rich and the poor alike should work with the sentiment of selflessness. The destitute and the beggar should also have this feeling. If the feeling of selflessness can be awakened in robbers and dacoits, it would be all the better. The robber can think, "If I have rich pickings today, I can make a house for some poor person, I can give a cow to someone, I can pay the four hundred rupees tuition fees for that boy, I can give twenty thousand rupees for a poor girl's wedding." Even if someone is a thief or a prostitute, an adulterer, dacoit, sadhu, holy man, householder, lawyer, doctor, lecturer, destitute or a beggar, everyone should feel for others. After a person has completed his karmas, he must become the medium of God.

How can one overcome expectations?

Swami Sivananda: Do you expect anything from your small child if you do something for him? Work for others in a similar manner without expecting anything. It may give you a little pain in the beginning if you have never worked in this line of selfless service, but after you have tasted the bliss of selfless service, you can never leave it. The whole world is yourself. The whole world is God for one who is not selfish. It is a world only for one who is selfish.

What is the popular perception that one has of the world?

Swami Niranjanananda: An unopened flower bud is not yet mature. The essence, colours, beauty and fragrance of the flower are all concentrated in the bud while the flower is forming. Smell, colour and form are all taking shape as an experience. Once the bud has grown to maturity and opens up in full bloom, the colours are now visible and can be appreciated by everyone. The smell, previously confined to the bud, has now become a fragrance wafting in the wind.

In creation too, these two states of acquiring and expressing are seen. The flower has gone through a process from acquiring to expressing. In the same way, life is a process of acquiring and expressing. However,

people generally identify more with acquiring and less with expressing. It is the preoccupation with acquiring that makes one self-oriented, self-centred and selfish. Moreover, it closes the doors of the intellect, the heart, the emotions and the mind. People are happy in their own world. Whatever challenges their comfort zone is rejected. Anything that does not conform to their ideas of fulfilment and joy is disregarded. They live their life in a straitjacket. The mind, body and concepts are put into a straitjacket. People are taught to look at the world in a particular way and what does not fit into that view does not exist.

There was a time when people were aware of the glory and beauty of the sunrise and the sunset. They were something mystical and attractive, harmonious, fulfilling and uplifting. Today when people look at the sunset or sunrise, their mathematical and scientific mind breaks down the sunrays into electrons that hit the atmosphere. The light particles spread everywhere and thus create different hues and colours. They have become sequential and linear, losing touch with their artistic and creative side which can appreciate nature and beauty. It is important to find a balance between the two hemispheres of the brain, between the artistic, creative side and the logical, sequential side. The artistic, creative side has the tendency to open up, to give and to expand. The logical, linear side has the tendency to accumulate, receive and acquire. Furthermore, it is natural when looking at the world through the intellect to see what is beneficial for 'me'.

When people see the world through their heart, a more selfless perspective emerges. They ask themselves, "What can I do for others?" or "How can I connect with others?" The head receives, the heart gives.

What is the outcome of seva?

Swami Sivananda: Service of humanity is, in fact, nothing short of service and worship of God, but one should serve with *bhava*, feeling. Doing abundant, spontaneous and unrestrained charity to relieve the pains of suffering

humanity is an effective means to destroy negative traits. If one gives, the whole wealth of the world will be one's own. This is the immutable, inexorable law of nature.

The spirit of service must deeply enter into one's very bones, cells, tissues and nerves. The reward is invaluable. Practise and feel the cosmic expansion and infinite bliss. By serving others one purifies one's heart. Egoism, hatred, jealousy and all the negative qualities vanish. Humility, sympathy, patience, tolerance, kindness and pure love are developed. Selfishness is rooted out. When one develops a broad and liberal outlook on life, one begins to feel oneness and unity.

Who can be classified as 'the other'?

Swami Satyananda: 'The other' is someone who has no connection with oneself, who is unrelated. There are two things in this world: selfishness and altruism. Selfishness is whatever is done for one's own sake; altruism is that which is done for another. Working for the person who is the other – someone unknown, helpless or orphaned – is called altruism, selflessness. However, working for one's children, parents and relatives as one's duty, even if one has no expectation from them, is selfish, as they are still one's own and one counts them as 'mine'. Even if one were detached in the performance of one's duty towards them, it cannot be seva, although it can be called detachment.

Even if we work for others, the desire for success does enter. How can we overcome this?

Swami Satyananda: If one works for others and any expectation of success enters the mind, then karma yoga is flawed. Seva done for others should be done keeping in mind their welfare, benefit accruing to them. When my child falls sick, I have him treated because I can feel his pain, but when your child is sick I do not feel his pain, only compassion. Now this is where *atmabhava*, the feeling of oneness, is lacking. *Atmabhava* means 'like oneself'. I did not look after your son

because I felt him to be my own; rather, I thought, ‘Okay, this is a poor man, let me help him.’

Actions are performed with various sentiments or attitudes and they are graded differently. The highest grade of seva is ‘do good and forget about it’. This is the best, but also the most difficult. No one can do it because whenever you do someone a good turn, you also think a little about how it will benefit you along the line somewhere.

If seva is without expectation, what motivates one to act?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are two types of karma: *sakama*, with expectation and desire, and *nishkama*, without expectation and desire. The fulfilment of personal desires is based on name, fame, power, money, security and so on. The focus is external, social, personal, self-oriented and self-motivated. At this level one is seeking fulfilment and satisfaction. This is the focus of actions in the world.

Nishkama means being disinterested, doing work without expectation. It would be wrong to say that one can exist without expectations. There is expectation, yet instead of a mundane, worldly expectation, it is possible to direct the feeling towards spiritual thoughts and God. Whenever one performs an action, one is responsible for the action and its outcome. The action can give praise or abuse, it can give monetary wealth or take it away.

While performing actions, people are conscious of what will lead to gain. If an action may lead to abuse, they will try to avoid it. If an action may result in their losing money, they will try to avoid it. People are constantly looking for ways to avoid the unpleasant, and this choice is known as *sakama*. *Sakama* means avoiding the unpleasant and working for the pleasant, that is, with expectation.

Nishkama, without expectation, involves actions with the mind fixed on spiritual, not worldly, thoughts. A servant has to perform many unpalatable activities, yet does so by disidentifying with the action. The servant knows the outcome is the responsibility of the master giving the instructions. To

become nishkama, free from expectations, one needs to have the same attitude towards God – to think of whatever one does as seva or service to God, to guru, to humanity.

How does one express creativity to fulfil the mandate of God?

Swami Niranjanananda: One connects with people, by helping those in need, by providing opportunities to those who have none to develop in life. This is the form of service, loving and giving that comes naturally when one has attained an illuminated spiritual state.

In history, when one looks at the lives of the enlightened beings and saints in all cultures and religions, one will find that the hallmark of their lives has been service – loving and giving unconditionally. Spiritual perfection in their lives is represented by these three acts: serve, love and give. This is seen strongly in both the Western Christian tradition and the Eastern ones. Therefore, the answer is in front of one's eyes – express the creative to bring out the beautiful in nature which is all around. This is the selfless contribution that an individual can make for the betterment of the world. This is the philosophy which has to be cultivated in life.

Swami Satyananda has given a practical approach to Swami Sivananda's mandate. Yoga is a gift he gave to develop oneself at a personal level. Seva gives us the opportunity to connect on the outer level with the pure sentiments. The outer level means the social level where one fulfils the needs of people, providing them with opportunities to become independent and self-reliant in life. The world becomes a better place when there is a positive connection and association between people. The world becomes a deadly place when everybody withdraws into their own shell.

How can the aspirant serve the guru?

Swami Sivananda: Selfless service purifies the heart and opens it to receive the divine light. Plunge into selfless service. Cheer up one who is in distress, encourage one who

is dispirited, wipe away the tears of the afflicted. Remove sorrow by kind, loving words. Make a man smile when he is in despair. Be a lamp to those who have lost their way. Be a doctor and nurse to the ailing. Be a boat and bridge to those who want to reach the other shore of fearlessness and immortality.

Do your duty to the best of your ability and leave the rest to God. Perform all actions with detachment in a spirit of dedication to the Divine, then they will not be binding. The heart will be purified. Spiritualize all activities. Let the eyes look with kindness, the tongue speak with sweetness, the hand touch with softness. Be as compassionate as Buddha, as pure as Bhishma, as truthful as Harischandra, as brave as Bhima. Remain soaked in remembrance of God with a one-pointed mind.

How can seva become part of one's lifestyle?

Swami Niranjanananda: Seva of living for others and not for oneself, becomes a way of life. It has been said:

Our ears do not become beautiful
By wearing golden earrings,
But by hearing the scriptures.
Similarly, our hands do not become beautiful
By wearing bangles, but by doing service.
The body is decorated not by sandal paste,
But by showing mercy and doing good to others.

How can one make action selfless?

Swami Niranjanananda: When action is not self-oriented but extending outwards towards other people in a selfless way, that selfless action is called seva. Generally seva is translated as service, but in reality *seva* means connecting with the another person. Connecting with other people happens when the mind and heart are not confused by their own selfish natures, not guided by their own desires and cravings, but have become peaceful, open and free.

When the heart and mind become peaceful, open and free, the individual becomes a human being in the real sense. When the qualities that are shared by human beings flower, they follow humanness in life, and the religion they follow becomes humanism, which is the expression of the divine nature in human life.

What is the best concept to have in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Having the good of others in mind as the basic universal concept with which to view life is the pronouncement of many enlightened beings: "Those who live for others truly live." However, this is one of the most difficult things to achieve in life.

What was the ambition of Saint Francis of Assisi? What was the desire of Jesus, Vivekananda and many other such people who have come from time to time? They had only one desire, to live for others, yet of course they also had to undergo training to realize this desire fully.

In living for others one uses the best of oneself. One expresses one's knowledge creatively. The expression of human qualities has to be balanced and harmonious. One must be able to feel compassion, affection, a sense of commitment and duty, and positivity. This is what one feels when one lives for others.

What is the outcome of seva?

Swami Sivananda: Service or seva should be practised until the end of one's life. It breaks the ego and expands the heart. It is an 'ever-ready polish' to keep the mind clean and pure and the body active and healthy. Service annihilates the sense of separateness, and selfishness is eradicated. With a broad and liberal outlook on life, one begins to feel oneness and unity and realizes: 'One in all and all in One'.

SWAMI SIVANANDA SARASWATI

What was Swami Sivananda's early life?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda was born in Pattamadai, in the district of Tirunalavalli in South India, on 8th September 1887. He was a descendant of a famous saint and scholar whose name was Appaya Dikshitar. Once, this saint went to Tirupathi to have the darshan of Tirupathi Balaji. At that time the Vaishnavites did not have the correct attitude towards the Shaivites. Appaya Dikshitar was a devotee of Shiva and he was not allowed to have darshan of Tirupathi Balaji. Then through the mysterious and extreme devotion of Appaya Dikshitar, a Shivalingam was found in the temple side by side with Tirupathi Balaji. That auspicious event changed the whole attitude of the Vaishnavites of that century.

It was in this illustrious line of great philosophers, saints and bhaktas that Swami Sivananda was born. Even as a child he displayed spiritual tendencies and was always loving and generous. After studying medicine in Tanjore, he became a medical doctor and served the sick on the rubber plantations of Malaysia. Realizing that man's maladies were of a deeper nature, he resigned his post in 1922 and returned to India. In 1923 he arrived in Rishikesh where he was initiated into sannyasa by Swami Vishwananda, a sannyasin who belonged to the southern tradition from Sringeri.

Thereafter, Swami Sivananda plunged headlong into spiritual life. He performed exhausting austerities. At midnight he could be seen chest-deep in the Ganga chanting *Om*. He practised a synthesis of karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga. He did not leave any stone unturned. He tried all the great methods, but he found that bhakti yoga, surrender, was the best form of self-realization. By repetition of name or mantra, by total surrender to God, by unflinching faith in the cosmic being, he believed one could attain the deepest and highest experience – nirvana, samadhi or moksha.

From 1923, Swami Sivananda remained in Rishikesh until his death in 1963. He did not mean to develop an ashram, but one grew up around him. He did not intend to make disciples and become a guru, but disciples rallied around him and made him a guru. The band of disciples grew year by year until finally they had to search for a place where they could all live together. At the site of the present Rishikesh ashram there was a dilapidated cowshed which Swamiji and his disciples acquired and occupied. Around this cowshed grew the ashram where the international structure of the Divine Life Society was born.

Was Swami Sivananda a jnani or a bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda was a sannyasin belonging to the highest order of Vedanta philosophy. This Vedanta philosophy holds that 'I am Brahman' and does not accept any lesser form of idol worship. It is a philosophy of pure monism, in which the truth is formless and nameless and all experience exists within the mind. This practical doctor was at the same time a true jnani, who spoke of the philosophy of the Absolute, and also a bhakta, one who is devoted to God. In fact, he believed that devotion to God, repetition and singing of the name alone were enough to enable one to cross the barriers of worldly consciousness.

What was it about Swami Sivananda that marked him as a great bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: Before I went to Swami Sivananda in 1943, I had met many gurus, but when I found him, I found the light. I feel proud that I lived with him up to 1956. It was a fantastic time. I had read about Christ many times, but never believed that such a man could live in this world. Compassion, love and consideration for others are difficult qualities to find, but in Swami Sivananda I found such a man.

He had no attachments, yet he loved everybody. He was large-hearted, yet disciplined, and his life was a constant sacrifice. Anyone coming to him for anything, received. He

was very powerful. Thousands came to him for relief from sickness. He healed millions, yet never proclaimed it. At the time of his death his disciples asked him, 'What is your message to humanity?' He did not speak, but took out a pen and wrote this final message to humankind: 'God prays with you. Everything else is unimportant.'

How did Swami Sivananda live a life of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda lived the highest expression of bhakti. During the time he performed austerities on the banks of the Ganga, at Swargashram in Rishikesh, another sannyasin by the name of Swami Rajarajeshwarananda was living in a cottage nearby. Swami Rajarajeshwarananda was an ardent worshipper of Devi Ma, the Cosmic Mother. However, despite practising a rigorous sadhana of japa, meditation and pooja for twelve years, he did not find any signs of spiritual attainment or progress in himself.

The time for Durga pooja was drawing near and Swami Raja wished to worship Devi with silken clothes, adornments and other offerings. However, he did not have the money to do so.

On the day before *Navaratri*, the nine-day special period when Devi is worshipped, there was a knock on his door. Upon answering, he found several Punjabi girls standing there, each bearing a plate with silken clothes, ornaments, money, fruit and the various items needed for pooja. The girls said to Swami Raja, "Swami Sivananda sent us with these items for you."

Having previously expressed to Swami Sivananda his desire to worship the Mother with these items, Swami Raja thought Swami Sivananda had sent the desired materials. He readily accepted them and asked the girls, "To whom do these plates belong?" The girls replied, "To the Anna Kshetra, the alms house," and went away.

A little later, Swami Raja went to Swami Sivananda's cottage and knocked on the door. When Swami Sivananda came out, Swami Raja asked him, "Who were those Punjabi

girls?” Swami Sivananda said, “Which girls?” Swami Raja answered, “The ones you sent to me with the ornaments, clothes and all the things needed for the Navaratri pooja.” Swami Sivananda said, “I did not send anyone.” Swami Raja was surprised. He went to the Anna Kshetra office, but did not find the girls there.

While recounting this incident many years later to the disciples of Swami Sivananda, Swami Raja said, “I had been practising austerities for many years so as to be blessed with a vision of Devi. Swami Sivananda did not practise any prescribed Devi sadhana, yet it was due to Swami Sivananda’s prayers alone that Devi gave me darshan in the form of those girls.”

It is true that Swami Sivananda did not undertake a formal ritualistic worship of Devi Ma. He acknowledged this fact himself during a visit to the ashram by a great scholar from South India. Upon seeing the prosperity of the ashram, the scholar noted that Swami Sivananda’s success in all that he undertook was surely the fruit of his worship of Tripura Sundari. Swami Sivananda replied, “I have never worshipped Tripura Sundari in the formal ritualistic way. Yes, in the morning after a bath I do chant a few Devi mantras, and whenever I see a woman, I bow to her mentally and chant *Om Sri Durgayai namah* or some other Devi mantra. For me, every woman is Devi Ma herself in a living, breathing form. This is my Sri Vidya upasana.”

Swami Sivananda’s bhakti was of a high calibre. He was not limited to any one name or form of the Divine; he simply saw the omnipresent God in every creature. He taught that worship and prayer should not be confined only to the temple. He believed that while ritual worship in the temple was necessary as primary education, the final culmination of such worship should be to conduct oneself in the world as if one were in a temple and behave towards all creatures as if one were in the presence of God Himself.

Swami Sivananda had internalized *vibhooti yoga*, the yoga of divine glories, described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Everything

reminded him of God. Whenever he came out of his room and saw the Ganga and the Himalayas, he remembered Sri Krishna, for in the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna says, “Amongst rivers, I am the Ganga and amongst the immovables, I am the Himalayas.” The sun, moon, planets, constellations, plants, trees, rivers, mountains, the brawny wrestler, the nimble-witted student – all are the manifestations of the glory of God. In all of them Swami Sivananda perceived the presence of divine energy, to the extent that even in his spectacles and shoes, the mundane items of daily use, he maintained the awareness of God’s presence. He would handle his spectacles and fountain pen as if picking up a newborn baby. He would shut the case gently after returning the spectacles to it. Perhaps it was for this reason that Swami Sivananda never broke anything in his entire life. Even when he unfurled and draped a shawl around himself, it was with such gentleness and innocence, lest he hurt the God immanent in the shawl in any way.

Once, Swami Sivananda was sitting in the ashram office and asked a sadhaka to sing a song. The sadhaka began to sing. Swami Sivananda told the devotees seated around, “See, this office is like a bazaar. People are chatting to each other, a song is being sung and the typewriter is making noise. However, in reality, every single thing is God. There is nothing to give up and nothing to gain. Just experience that everything is God, and nothing else. The song is God, the devotee is also God, the typist is God too; each and every object and person is God.” Swami Sivananda was the crest jewel of bhakti.

What qualities did Swami Sivananda express in his life?

Swami Satyananda: Many times when people talk about love I just laugh at them. I have never met any other person who I think knows love, but I can definitely say that Swami Sivananda was a man whose very being emanated love. Nevertheless, he was the least emotional person I have known – completely calm, quiet, unruffled and absolutely

detached. He was the best of men I have seen in my life. I have never seen Christ, but I have seen Swami Sivananda, and therefore I believe Christ must have existed. He was a man whose kindness and compassion knew no bounds. He was nothing but sweetness, nothing but smiling eyes.

In everything he did throughout his life, he maintained only one attitude: to do good to everybody. He was never a dictator and never interfered with his disciples. In fact, he used to touch the feet of his disciples just like a disciple touches his master's feet. Many times I made mistakes, both in my life and in the ashram, as an inmate and as an executive. I was always expecting to be called by him, but he never once called me. I thought that he would rebuke me or admonish me, or tell me what was right and wrong, but he never said one word. When I used to go to him he would never raise the point. He would just say the usual things. He never recognized the mistakes in man. He always used to say that everybody had in him the spark of divinity.

Swami Sivananda lived life in all its completeness: at once a great saint of the calibre of Christ; an administrator in the highest position; a sannyasin with total detachment from life; a man brimming over with compassion, love and charity, but living a life of austerity and dispassion; a bhakta and devotee of God, and side by side a philosopher of superior intellect; a man with discipline and strictness, as well as loving kindness for every sentient and insentient creation of God.

Why is it said that Swami Sivananda's life was a continual expression of devotion, generosity, kindness and understanding?

Swami Satyananda: When Swami Sivananda came to Rishikesh, he was so sincere and devoted that all the swamis who were living nearby were very much influenced by him. Sometimes he used to collect a few chapatis from his daily bhiksha and keep them in a box. When he had a sufficient number, he would close his doors from the inside for a week and practise his own sadhana.

With this sincere devotion to spiritual life, he soon became a darling of the swamis there. In reaction to this, there naturally developed a gang of rascals who used to harass him, and actually cause him injury as well. His attitude towards these people was just superhuman. He used to say, "If someone kicks you, give him love," and he practised this every day. Later, when Swami Sivananda became famous, he would give these same people great respect and hold them in esteem.

He was generous and gave people anything they asked for. His main motto was 'Give, give give'. Even if he had been alerted that a man had come to cheat him, he would not listen. He would say, "That is his karma, and this is my karma." He freely distributed food, money, books, clothes, blankets. If somebody told him, "Swamiji, this man is dishonest; do not give him a blanket," Swamiji would say, "God has given it to me for him. The money does not belong to me, the ashram does not belong to me."

How did Swami Sivananda act in regard to his knowledge?

Swami Satyananda: At one time I was writing a commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. I had a sound intellectual knowledge of Sanskrit and philosophy. My earlier academic background had been bright, but nevertheless I had great difficulties in writing the commentary on this Upanishad. From time to time when I used to go to Swamiji for clarification, he used to direct me to His Holiness Tapovanamji Maharaj. He was not a disciple of Swamiji's and did not live in Rishikesh, but in Uttarkashi, a place on the way to Ganga's origin. He was a venerable swami, a master of the Upanishads and a great Sanskrit scholar.

During his life, Swami Sivananda wrote approximately three hundred to four hundred books. In the period I was there, he had already finished two hundred-fifty of them. However, it was a very important part of his philosophy not to pose, even before his disciples, that he knew everything. Swami Sivananda could have also guided me by referring

me to a few books here and there, but he was my well-wisher and knew that it was best to send me to a great authority like Swami Tapovanamji Maharaj.

Likewise, whenever Swami Tapovanam visited Rishikesh during the snowy winter, Swami Sivananda would say to me, “Swami Tapovanam is here, go and study with him.” So I would go to Swami Tapovanam with my philosophical queries and grammatical complications. I used to sit with him for hours discussing philosophy, and when I returned I always found Swami Sivananda waiting for me. He would call me to his kutir and question me, “What did you ask and what did he say?” I would tell him everything I had learned, and while I was talking Swamiji would be busy writing it all down. The next morning, he would get these notes typed out and would develop a story, an article or a poem out of those ideas which I had received from Swami Tapovanam and narrated to him.

What is the beginning of Swami Sivananda’s yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first step in Sivananda yoga is service. The second step is love. Service and love are concepts of bhakti, therefore Swami Sivananda’s yoga begins with bhakti. When service and love become predominant in life, the mind is drawn to contemplation and remembrance of God, the Supreme Spirit. The devotee begins to see God and experience God’s glory within himself, and expresses that glory. This is why the definition of bhakti yoga is service and love.

What was Swami Sivananda’s attitude towards criticism?

Swami Satyananda: His attitude towards people was unique. If anyone was concerned about being criticized, he explained simply, “It is a divine test. When you purchase a steel rod, you don’t examine it, but when you purchase a rod of gold, you examine it thoroughly. If you go to purchase a diamond, you don’t just pick up the first one you see. Likewise now, when God is choosing you, he should test you. It is not your

karma that is coming to you in the form of suffering. It is not your viciousness that is causing you criticism. It is the test of the divine, so that you may pass through it, and then you will be given the higher wisdom.”

Why do so many aspirants regard Swami Sivananda as a beacon of light?

Swami Satyananda: Such a man can be an example to us all. Most people are puzzled by the day-to-day problems of life. They are swayed by passions and emotions and dejected when they face the ups and downs in their emotional life. Definitely, to sincere people, the question does arise, “How is it possible for me, a person with so many limitations, to reach the highest pinnacle of life?” To such sincere people, who are disappointed and dejected by the cruelties of life, Swami Sivananda is like a beacon of light. To hear about him is a joy, to think about him is yoga and to discuss him is to invest the time properly. Even though he lived in the physical body, he was not a physical soul, and his presence developed the inner awareness without any difficulty.

For a spiritual aspirant, what is the importance of a sad-guru like Swami Sivananda?

Swami Satyananda: In one of the Upanishads there is a parable. A disciple asked his guru, “How does a man walk? How does a man move?” The guru replied, “In the light of the sun he moves and walks.” Then the disciple asked, “If the sun is set, how does he move and how does he walk?” The guru replied, “In the light of the moon.” Then the disciple asked again, “When the sun is set and the moon is set, in whose light does one walk?” The guru replied, “In the light of the stars.” Again the disciple interrogated, “When the sun is set and when the moon is set and the stars are twinkling no more, in whose light does he walk?” The guru replied, “In his own light.”

What is this light he is talking about? When the mind is swayed by passion, when the intellect is filled with confusion,

when your own beliefs betray you, when your own concepts do not help you anymore in life, then you will have to raise your own consciousness. You will have to awaken your own spirit. In order to awaken the spirit, it is important that a sadguru be sought. Such a guru was Swami Sivananda, not only in his own time, but even today when the message of his life and teachings is a lamp unto those who have yet to awaken their own inner light.

What were the main traits in the life of Swami Sivananda?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the life of Swami Sivananda, one can see two main traits. The first is the zeal to serve and the second is the ability to see divinity in each and every person. The zeal to serve is known as seva. Seva is normally translated simply as ‘service’. *Seva* actually means service in which one transcends one’s own selfish nature, becomes selfless and connects with everybody. Seva is not service with expectation, seva is service without expectation.

What do people need in life? When they are distressed, they need somebody to hold their hand. When they are alone, they need a stranger to come and give them a nice smile. When they have fallen, they need somebody who can come and help them stand up again. A person with such qualities is not a selfish person; he is a selfless person.

Swami Sivananda was the epitome of selfless seva. In his autobiography he says, “I have troubled my body a lot; I have performed many austerities. My body is tired. It aches and at times it is sick. However, when I see a person who needs my service, my body receives the energy; I do not know from where. I am ever ready to serve anybody, twenty-four hours of the day, regardless of my physical or mental state and condition.” Seva is reflected in the life of Sri Swami Sivananda.

Regarding the second characteristic of aradhana, seeing and worshipping the divinity in each and every person or thing, he says, “I have never worshipped formally in a temple, but whenever I see a woman, I see her as manifestation of Shakti. I bow down with respect in front

of her and mentally say the mantra of Shakti: *Om Durgayai namaha, Om Saraswatyai namaha, Om Lakshmyai namaha*. With those mantras in my mind, I adore and worship the lady who is in front of me. When I see a man, I think him as the representative of Narayana, Shiva, Brahma, and I bow my head in respect to that man and mentally say the mantra *Om Namō Narayana, Om namah Shivaya*. That is my aradhana. That is the way I see divinity in each and every one.”

The highest qualities of life have been expressed so simply in the life of Sri Swami Sivananda. These two traits come alive when one studies his autobiography. A person who is arrogant cannot be a saint. A person who is selfish cannot be a saint or even a spiritual luminary. The true spiritual luminary, the true saint, the true sannyasin, is a person who is totally selfless and does not crave anything for his or her own self. Sri Swami Satyananda always said, “To think of Swami Sivananda is yoga.”

What is Swami Sivananda’s philosophy?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda’s fundamental philosophy of life was service. His priorities were: “Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize.” Meditation was at the end of his list, a long way off. Whereas people start spiritual life with meditation, my guru’s spiritual life started with service and culminated in meditation. The beginning of spiritual life stems from service to humanity.

Swami Sivananda used to say that just as there is an education system from kindergarten to university, similarly there is a schooling system in spiritual life. The first level is service, the second is love, the third is giving. God exists, so one has to think about Him. One has to meditate, pray and purify one’s heart. I asked, “But how?” He said that the kindergarten of spiritual life is service. What comes next? Loving others. Then the next class is give, give and give. This elementary class of spiritual life will prove very useful.

After this, Swami Sivananda said that one should purify the self: purify the mind, heart, intentions and actions with

the yamas and niyamas. Practise *ahimsa*, non-violence, *satya*, truthfulness, *brahmacharya*, sensual restraint, *aparigraha*, non-possessiveness, *tapasya*, austerity, *asteya*, honesty, *shaucha*, cleanliness, *santosh*, contentment, and so on. Purification means that just as one cleans dirty clothes by putting them in detergent, so one puts one's heart in detergent, soaks it and cleans it.

Swami Sivananda said, "Suffering and pain is the crucible into which nature throws a man whenever she wants to make him a sublime superman." One has to accept pain and not be afraid of suffering. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." One should not depend on wealth as one's security in life. Security in life is purification.

After purification, Swami Sivananda spoke of meditation. He said that meditation is like going to college, it is higher education. In meditation or prayer one enters a state of *shanti*, peace or tranquillity, where one becomes one with God. Whether in the form of Rama, Christ, Guru or Govinda, God is everywhere. He exists in every particle. There is nowhere He is not present. Finally, comes realization.

Serve, love and give are elementary education. Purify is intermediate education, and meditation is college education. Realization is postgraduate education. This is the curriculum of spiritual schooling. Swami Sivananda gave me the mantra: serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize, be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate, bear insult, bear injury. This is very difficult, but it is the highest sadhana!

It took me many years to emulate my guru and practise his principles. He used to say, "Whatever you have, give it to others. It does not belong to you." Nothing belongs to me, nothing is mine. I am just a medium.

Why is Swami Sivananda's yoga a philosophy of life?

Swami Niranjanananda: A basic philosophy that nurtures spiritual development, which is beyond the social, religious or material perspective of life, is necessary in everybody's

life. This philosophy is based on selfless connection, involvement or association.

People know that they are experiencing compassion when they feel compassionate towards strangers, not only those people they call their own. They know when they have learned to love as they begin to love total strangers, not only those with whom they identify. They know they are transforming in their cocoon and becoming butterflies as their hearts open to the world and to the environment around them. A spiritual philosophy is a must, a necessary component in everybody's life in order to enrich life and to understand the process of yoga. According to Swami Sivananda, 'serve, love, give, purify' constitute the four foundations of a personal spiritual philosophy.

What is meant by Swami Sivananda's yoga of self-expression?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sage Patanjali and Swami Sivananda have given definite systems for the development of the human personality. In the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali described the method for working with oneself to transform one's restricted, conditioned nature and to experience inner freedom. Sage Patanjali's system represents the effort one makes in sadhana to understand oneself. Swami Sivananda emphasized self-expression and self-actualization. He defined the eightfold path of self-expression. The yoga of Swami Sivananda begins where the yoga of Sage Patanjali stops.

After having attained personal enlightenment, Swami Satyananda began to involve himself more with other people. In his yoga, the first stage is seva. If seva comes after samadhi, after dhyana, what is it? It is again involving oneself in the affairs of other people and the world. What one attains, experiences and acquires through the process of sadhana has to be used for the betterment and uplift of others.

The sequence of Sage Patanjali's yoga begins with the yamas and niyamas. Yama and niyama help to regulate the

functions of the human personality and nature. After that come asana and pranayama, then pratyahara and dharana, followed by dhyana and samadhi. From a seed we have become a tree and its fruits come in samadhi. Sivananda yoga begins with seva and love. They are the first two stages, the first expressions of this yogic journey. The third and fourth stages are giving and purifying. The fifth and sixth stages are becoming good and doing good. The seventh and eighth stages are meditating and realizing.

The stages of meditation and realization are the same as the seventh and eighth stages of Sage Patanjali's yoga: dhyana and samadhi. Sage Patanjali's dhyana and samadhi represent the microcosmic effort, where the sadhaka experiences the flowering within. The meditation and realization of Sivananda yoga is the macrocosmic expression, where one experiences oneness with the higher nature, which is not a personal, subjective experience. It is a connection with people, with the world, with creation and with God.

If, after attaining realization, one stands before God and says, "I have become enlightened, now I am able to experience you," God will say, "You have been selfish because you desired God-realization, which is only for yourself. By attaining this state you have not helped anyone. You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven because you have only cared for your own emancipation, freedom and realization, not the suffering of any other being around you. Go back to the world and become selfless. Die to live the divine life."

What are the eight steps of Sivananda yoga and how were they put into practice by Swami Satyananda?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first component is service. Service is an extension of one's actions. When one is able to serve others without expectations, it becomes seva. Seva has to be connected with the idea of compassion and love. Love has to be experienced in an expressive unconditional way. From the example of Swami Satyananda it can be seen that unconditional love means giving and involving oneself, and

conditioned love is taking, withdrawing and isolating oneself. People are conditioned and therefore the expression of their qualities is also conditioned. They take from other people to fulfil their needs and aspirations. They become happy with what they have received and they isolate themselves from other people. Taking and isolating oneself is reflected in relationships too, 'me and mine', not letting go of what one considers one's own. Taking and withdrawing, not sharing, is conditioned love.

Giving and involving becomes unconditional love. When people give, they are not taking, not shutting themselves within four walls, instead they are reaching out to others and helping them grow. As they help others develop, they are involving themselves in their journey, encouraging them to be active participants in the process of growth, inspiring them to transform their restrictive natures.

According to Sri Swami Satyananda, charity is the mother of poverty. From charity, dependence takes birth. If one gives a fish to a hungry person, he will expect another fish next time from someone else. He becomes dependent on other people and rather than acting he becomes poor and dependent. Giving is not charity but helping the other person uplift the quality of their life. Giving can happen in any form.

In the early 1970s, a yoga seminar was conducted in a mining region in India. The miners were poor people who would go to a bar and drink after working all day in the mines, then go home, abuse their wives and children and go to sleep. There was little food or clothing in the homes and sickness was evident. Part of the yoga seminar was shankhaprakshalana, a practice for intestinal cleansing. It was done by the entire workforce. After a month, a big change in the lifestyle of the people was seen. After doing shankhaprakshalana, the men had to follow certain dietary rules, including not drinking alcohol for a month due to the sensitivity of the stomach lining. The miners were following that rule, so their health and the family environment had

improved. As a result, the families were saving money which was being spent on food, clothes and medical care as well as books, notebooks and pens for the children's education. Their lives had improved.

Yoga can change people's lives. If a positive change improves people's living conditions, that is also a form of giving, a type of service. In this way, yoga and one's personal attainments can be used to improve other people's quality of life. Most human actions are guided by ambitions and needs, otherwise there would be no need to perform action. Ambitions and needs only represent one's aspirations to acquire something better in life. When action is performed to fulfil one's needs and ambitions, it is self-oriented, for one's own benefit, wellbeing and happiness.

When action is not self-oriented but extending outwards towards other people in a selfless way, that selfless action is called *seva*. *Seva* means connecting with the other person. Connecting with other people happens when the mind and heart are not confused by their own selfish natures, not guided by their own desires and cravings, but have become peaceful, open and free. When the heart and mind become peaceful, open and free, one becomes a human being in the real sense. When the qualities that one shares as a human being flower, one follows humanness in life, and this becomes humanism, which is the expression of the divine nature in human life.

How was love, the second step, expressed by Swami Satyananda?

Swami Niranjanananda: When action is directed for the upliftment of others, it carries the emotion of love. This love is universal, not between two people, but the entire world and even unknown people become the object of love. Swami Sivananda used to convey this idea when telling his disciples and students to live the divine life, not the mundane life,

In the 1990s, when Sri Swami Satyananda was performing *sadhana* in isolation, he had absolutely no contact with

anyone. One day he came out of his sadhana, called Swami Satsangi and said, “In a nearby village a house has burned down. The husband has died, the wife and three children are outside under a tree without food or shelter. It is monsoon season. Locate that family, provide them with food and shelter immediately.”

How could a person doing sadhana in isolation know what had happened in a village and describe it in great detail? It took us one week to locate the family, searching in different villages in the surrounding areas, and when we located them it was exactly how Sri Swamiji had described it. Immediate arrangements were made to provide food and shelter.

Some years later, somebody asked Sri Swamiji, “How do saints or enlightened beings help people when they suffer?” Sri Swamiji said, “A person who is in tune with God remains in tune with God. A person who is suffering sends a prayer to God to help overcome the suffering. The cry of suffering reaches God’s ears and God diverts that prayer to someone who is capable of helping the person in need.” When Sri Swamiji said this, I imagined the cry of that woman’s agony and suffering. God heard her prayer and diverted it to a person who was in tune with God’s energy, who was in a position to help the woman. That is an example of unconditional love and connection with the higher nature. Yoga can be defined as becoming human, connecting with others. This connection takes place through involvement, service and through expressing the unifying power called love.

What is the origin of the third step?

Swami Niranjanananda: The third stage of Sivananda yoga, is to give the best of oneself to the world to ensure that one has contributed in the appropriate manner. Giving is not possible until one becomes unconditional, until one develops awareness of other people. In the absence of giving there is only accumulation.

There is a story in the Upanishads of a demon, a deva and a human who wanted to ask God how to live a complete and whole life. They heard thunder and believed it was a message from God. The *deva*, divine being, said the instruction was to learn restraint. The demon said the instruction was to be compassionate. The human said the message was to learn to give. The demonical nature spreads suffering and pain, the tamasic vritti, so they need to learn compassion to balance their nature. Divine beings are indulgent, so the message from God was restraint. The nature of human beings is accumulation, so the instruction from God was to give.

What is meant by purity?

Swami Niranjanananda: The fourth step of Swami Sivananda's yoga is internal purification. Purity is the natural state of the human personality. Essentially people are pure beings, yet when they come into this world, even though they may not be active participants, dust attaches to their clothes and the clothes look dirty.

The Indian poet and saint, Kabir, wrote his last poem when he was dying. He said, "When I was born, I was a pure, clean, white sheet and now, at the moment of death, I have folded that pure, clean, white sheet and returned it to God. I made sure that it did not become dirty." That is the concept of purity – keeping one's clothes clean even in a dirty environment.

The lotus takes birth in water and grows in water, yet not a single drop of water attaches to it. Yogis have used this image as the symbol of purity: To live in the world, but to be free from the colours of the world. Born in the mud, in the mire of the lake, one grows through the water, yet the water does not affect one's growth and the leaves and flowers are always dry. That is purity. With this purity, a state of mind evolves which is transcendental, free from any kind of craving or desire.

How does ‘be good, do good’ become alive in one’s life?

Swami Niranjanananda: With the attainment of purity, the next step is that human life becomes good. There are no dark spots, only an expression of beauty, expressed in suffering or happiness. It is the equipoised, harmonious state of living. When in harmony with oneself, with nature and the divine, actions become good. There is no awareness of the actions becoming good as there is no arrogance.

Humility brings one closer to one’s own internal divine nature, and one does good without knowing it. A flower does not know that it is spreading fragrance and beauty; it only exists. The flower cannot see its own beauty nor can it smell its own fragrance. That is how a perfect being, an enlightened being has to be, how a sadhaka, an aspirant has to be. The fragrance and beauty emanate naturally and spontaneously without one knowing. If one knows that it is happening, ego and arrogance will find their roots. In history there have been many examples of people who have walked the free path and brought joy and happiness into many people’s lives.

What are the last two steps on the path of Swami Sivananda’s yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one becomes good in all dimensions and expresses goodness and purity, one is connected with the entire nature and humanity. In that state the unified field of consciousness is experienced. At a subtle and transcendental level one unites with the entire universal consciousness. In Swami Sivananda’s yoga, the process leading to that identification with the universal is known as meditation. Merging with that final state of the transcendental nature is known as realization. These are the potentials and possibilities of human life which one cannot just attain and experience, but also live. This is the progression of yoga, involving participation of the whole life and the person in the development of the universal nature.

Sri Swami Satyananda has stated that the destiny of the human being is to cultivate spiritual awareness. One can live

that destiny and cultivate that spiritual awareness by being careful. The first aim of yoga is acquiring personal discipline, which helps to tune the body-mind-spirit unit. One can only reach out to oneself and to other people when one becomes disciplined, when one becomes the master of one's actions and reactions.

What is Swami Sivananda's path of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the lives of saints, the meaning of bhakti is not prayer, but seva and prem, service and love. In Swami Sivananda's ashtanga yoga the first limb is serve, the second is love and the third is give – take with a hundred hands and give with a thousand hands. When one is able to do this, one's emotions become pure. The fourth limb is inner purity, the fifth is to be filled with virtues, the sixth is to have positive expression, the seventh is to centre the mind on God, and the eighth is to realize the presence of God in one's life. These eight steps are part of bhakti yoga.

Sri Swami Satyananda says that the culmination of all yogas is Sivananda yoga. Practise hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, dhyana yoga, mantra yoga. Practise as many yogas as there are. Ultimately, though, you have to take refuge in the path of bhakti. Sri Swami Satyananda says, "I have studied much and searched a lot; however, I experienced fulfilment and completion only when I followed the path of bhakti."

How would you describe your aim in life?

Swami Sivananda: I have never longed for liberation. I have never aspired for God-realization. I shall go on serving everyone. I shall go on purifying my heart through selfless service. I shall always try to see God in everyone. God Himself should take pity on me and give me liberation. Otherwise I shall take birth again and go on serving until God Himself voluntarily offers me liberation. My nature is to work. My goal is to serve. This spirit of service has been in me since childhood. Even if this organization, the Divine

Life Society, collapses, I will sit in a hut, serve a few patients, print some leaflets and thus serve humanity.

SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

What are Swami Satyananda's special qualities?

Swami Sivananda: Few would have such vairagya at such a young age. Swami Satyananda is full of the Nachiketas element. Yet any work that he takes up he will complete in a perfect manner. He does the work of four people and yet never complains. He is a versatile genius and a linguist too. Yet, he is humble and simple – an ideal sadhaka and nishkamyā sevak. He is a pillar of the Divine Life Mission.

Has anyone managed to stop a river from flowing or the sun and the moon from rising, that I could have stopped Satyam? He has a lot to accomplish. He is my real successor. Most disciples are not at all devoted to their guru, and of the remaining few, most are blind in their devotion. After the guru's demise, their boat also capsizes. But Satyam is that luminous flame which will go on spreading the name of Siva and the light of his teachings throughout the entire world. Swami Satyam is satyam indeed in word, thought and deed.

How did Swami Sivananda establish a lineage?

Swami Niranjanananda: At the time of initiating Swami Satyananda, Swami Sivananda had said, "At last I have found the disciple I was waiting for. For it is he who will continue with my mission and nobody else will be able to do so. For it is he who shall carry on with my mission, and not others." The beautiful lineage of guru and disciple, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, is the strength of people's lives and the inspirations that they follow.

People have been given the opportunity to live their teachings in the truest sense and not live the whims of their mind for their own pleasure and satisfaction. People who follow their teaching are part of a vision, a tradition of enlightened beings and aspiration.

What has Sri Swami Satyananda shown in his life?

Swami Niranjanananda: In human society and human civilization, people who believe that they can guide human society through power and law become politicians. People who believe that they can become healers of the sick become doctors. There is a group of people who believe that through their own experience of peace and culture in their lives, they can propagate peace and culture, and they become sannyasins. They become examples in society whom people emulate. They become the luminaries and saints, the guiding light of humanity.

Sri Swami Satyananda is in this category, for he continues to teach even after his mahasamadhi. Death is something which can be invoked. It can be called and desired, not out of pain and suffering, but with the realization and knowledge that it is only a process of leaving behind the gross and material to unite with the transcendental and divine. Just as one steps into marital life from bachelor life after finding the right company, in the same way, the soul or spirit of an enlightened one, which is already enlightened in this life, merges with the cosmic spirit. And that is the destiny of every human being, whether it is realized or not.

Sri Swami Satyananda has shown that by living in the right manner, by cultivating the right qualities and attitude, by expressing the right behaviour and samskaras, one can live a complete life no matter what condition one is in. One may live as a fakir or as an affluent person, yet one lives contented, fulfilled, satisfied and happy. There is no greater pleasure than a life of contentment, happiness, fulfilment, without any cravings left.

That is the state of shanti. That is the state where there are no dissipations and only awareness of wholeness and completeness, *poornata*, exists. Attainment of this poornata is the aim of life, and through his example Swami Satyananda has shown that it can be attained. It is that inspiration which people cherish in their hearts, for it is not only a ray of hope; people have seen in him the sun of hope.

How did Sri Swami Satyananda fulfil the mandate of his guru?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda said about his disciple, Swami Satyananda, “He is my true successor and Rishikesh is not big enough to contain him. The world is his family.” With that inspiration and blessing, Sri Swamiji left to fulfil the mandate of his guru to propagate yoga ‘from door to door and shore to shore’. In accordance with this mandate, he worked for yoga for twenty years. He inspired millions globally to adopt yoga as a way of life, a way of discipline, a way to find physical, psychological and spiritual succour. He inspired people to use yoga as a means to soften oneself, to soften the heart, to soften the mind, to soften the spirit and to excel in everything that one does. He inspired the aspirant to be an awakened person, to be an enlightened person, not in terms of God-realization, but in terms of realizing the beauty and the potential that life has to offer. If one realizes the beauty of life, the bliss in life, the potential of life, then one is close to God-realization.

Sri Swami Satyananda created the revolution of yoga, a global renaissance of yoga, from Munger. He made Munger the focal point of yoga, and today Ganga Darshan stands tall as the focal point of yoga in the world. This is Sri Swami Satyananda’s gift to humanity.

When he knew that Swami Sivananda had released him from the mandate to propagate yoga and he had exhausted all his karmas and samskaras, Sri Swamiji left the ashram to live like a sannyasin. He lived in the simplest manner, travelling barefoot. A person who used to fly first-class in planes was travelling barefoot, and sitting in the unreserved coaches of the trains in India!

As a sannyasin he left his guru’s ashram, as a sannyasin he came to Munger, and as a sannyasin he left Munger, taking nothing with him. He brought to Munger a hundred and eight rupees, given to him by Swami Sivananda, and he left Munger with a hundred and eight rupees given by me

at the time of his departure. That was the only property he had, besides the two dhotis on his body.

Swami Satyananda created the Bihar School of Yoga as the epicentre of the yogic renaissance and movement, and even today it stands in its own right as the lighthouse of yoga around the world. In the course of time, he established himself in Rikhia and immersed himself in intense sadhanas that only sannyasins of the highest calibre can perform. In Rikhia he lived the teachings and principles taught to him by his guru. These were ingrained in his nature due to the transference of information and energy, *shaktipat*. Serve, love and give became the mantra and Rikhiapeeth was born of the sankalpa.

In Rikhiapeeth one finds the inspiration to live a life devoted and dedicated to the upliftment of each and every one. That learning is there and it comes naturally and spontaneously – opening of the heart, connecting with people, living the ideals of sannyasa, living the principles of serving, loving and giving. Rikhiapeeth has developed beyond imagination. It is a movement, not an institution. It is a movement that has inspired and encouraged millions to change their outlook, their attitude, their mentality, their viewpoint and their perspective on life.

Through Rikhiapeeth, the blessings of Sri Swami Sivananda and the blessings of Sri Swami Satyananda are being spread all over the world, including India, both materially and spiritually. This is the inspiration, this is the life of a sannyasin that Sri Swamiji lived. This is the inspiration of Sri Swami Sivananda, shared by Sri Swamiji with all. The gift of yoga was the first benediction, and the gift to connect with one's own heart is the second benediction.

What is the ultimate aim of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is not blowing the conch, not placing flowers in front of an altar, not showing the light to the image on the altar. These may be necessary for one's

mental discipline, to become a foundation for a personal discipline, yet they are not the aim. The ultimate aim of bhakti yoga is to just be overpowered by love; love which knows no distinction between one and the other. This is one quality of love which a few people, the enlightened beings, have experienced. They were able to come out of their self-oriented shells and radiate the light of love to the rest of the community, and when people entered the light of love they were able to change. This is the bhakti that Sri Swami Satyananda was teaching in Rikhia, by using the example of Swami Sivananda's thoughts and philosophy.

When does an action become service? When that action is infused with love. Action without love is not seva, it is employment. People are always working, yet there is no love for what they are doing. There is only an awareness that they will be receiving something in return after they have finished the job.

All spiritual traditions say that God is love. Love and hatred are the only two things that matter in life. Either one likes or one dislikes, either one accepts or one rejects, either one loves or one hates. These are the two poles between which life swings. Hate is a conditioned nature of the conditioned body and mind. Love is the free, spontaneous, expansive expression of the liberated mind, which is not craving indulgence, satisfaction and fulfilment for its own contentment and happiness.

Love is the central theme of the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of Buddha. Words, ideas and philosophies can be multifarious, even in yoga, yet ultimately everything comes back to bhakti, to the expression of love. Love has to be cultivated by lighting the bulbs in one's heart. This has to be experienced by putting oneself through sadhana, so that one's energy can break the hard shell. Spiritual love, not sensuality, has to become a power in one's life. When it gains in force and power, it breaks the shell of self-oriented awareness, and liberation is experienced, freedom is experienced. This is the journey that one has to undertake: from yoga to humanism.

SWAMI DHARMASHAKTI SARASWATI

What is an ideal example of padasevanam?

Swami Satyananda: Many years ago I went to Gangotri. Satyabrat and Dharmashakti, Swami Niranjan's father and mother, accompanied me. We were taking a bath in the river Ganga when Satyabrat made a request, "Swamiji, please give something to Dharmashakti." I said, "There is no child in her destiny, but there is one in mine." However, he kept asking me; it was purely a joke. So I said, "Okay, make a resolve that you will give that child to me and not keep it for yourself," and so the resolve was made. Dharmashakti agreed, saying, "Yes, I will return it." We had the type of relationship where they always followed my instructions and carried them out. Swami Niranjan was born and Satyabrat returned him to me. If they had taken Niranjan, he would not have survived, because Niranjan is my *manas putra*, mind-born son.

Who was Swami Dharmashakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Basanti Devi was born in Madhya Pradesh. In her early childhood her mother, sensing a future full of struggle, inculcated in her the teachings of the *Ramayana* and other spiritual literature, as well as the lives of great saints. At the age of thirteen she was married to Satyabrat Srivastava whose open, friendly and spiritual nature was an important influence in her life. Satyabrat became a disciple of Swami Sivananda and in 1957 the couple went to Rishikesh for darshan and diksha. When Satyabrat was receiving mantra diksha, he looked around for his wife, but Swami Sivananda said, "She will not take diksha from me. Her guru will come to her at her home."

Paramahansa Satyananda came to Rajnandgaon in 1958. On the Shravan Poornima day he initiated Basanti Devi and she became Dharmashakti. During the same year, Dharmashakti and Satyabrat went on a pilgrimage to Uttarakhand with Paramahansa Satyananda. In Gangotri, Dharmashakti

had many spiritual experiences and a sankalpa came to her mind which was to shape the direction of the rest of her life. She resolved that, "Should I bear a child, I will give him to Paramahansa Satyananda." This sankalpa she later communicated to Satyabrat who endorsed it with repeated affirmations.

After twenty-four years of marriage, on 14th February 1960, at the age of thirty-six a son was born to Dharmashakti. Five weeks after the birth of the child, Paramahansa Satyananda came to remind the couple of the resolve they had made and said, "Fulfil your sankalpa. In your lap is lying the valuable treasure of humanity. Place this jewel in the hands of the sannyasin as promised." The couple looked at each other and Dharmashakti lovingly placed the child in the extended arms of Paramahansa Satyananda saying, "Oh Prabhu, please accept my offering."

The dharmic couple thereafter became actively engaged in spreading the guru's mission. In 1963, the magazines of Paramahansa Satyananda's mission began publication from Rajnandgaon, and Dharmashakti served as editor, publisher and distributor. Rajnandgaon became the headquarters of Paramahamsaji's International Yoga Fellowship Movement, and Dharmashakti was its first secretary.

Satyabrat had been initiated into sannyasa and was actively engaged in propagating the guru's mission in Madhya Pradesh. The inauguration of the Rajnandgaon Yoga Ashram in 1971 further increased Dharmashakti's responsibilities. At the end of that year, her husband met with an accident and died. Dharmashakti was deeply shaken by this experience but, having the mettle of a true disciple, she continued to serve her guru's mission.

For the next fifteen years, she worked relentlessly and was the pillar of her guru's mission. In 1985, she took sannyasa diksha and Paramahamsaji commented, "You were a sannyasin right from the beginning. Sannyasa does not come with guru clothes or with long matted locks. The sannyasin is a person who is always dedicated to guru seva, whose life is

meant for service. You have given a new meaning and value to sannyasa.”

It can be rightfully said that Swami Dharmashakti is one sannyasin who has stood the test of time. She is the first disciple whom Paramahansa Satyananda initiated and perhaps the only disciple who, in times of great adversity, always remained a strong and true supporter of her guru’s mission. Although her life was full of suffering and hardship, her faith in guru never wavered. She is an ideal example of simplicity, saintliness, total dedication and renunciation.

What instructions and sadhana were given to Dharmashakti to prepare her for being Niranjan’s mother?

Swami Satyananda: It is good to wake up around four or half past four in the morning and do japa meditation. After half an hour to forty-five minutes it is natural for the legs to begin paining. Therefore, change the asana you are sitting in after awhile and rest the legs. If you do forty to fifty malas, that’s quite enough. In this situation you feel very tired, sitting in one asana, doing japa, doing so many malas. At such times, if true meditation occurs even for five minutes, then life itself will change. If you feel lethargic after japa meditation, then sleep for a while. Focus your mind only on japa meditation, bhajan, kirtan, the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, mental japa while working, and contemplation of the ishta. Stop all unnecessary talk, do not be scared or nervous, maintain your faith in God and if your self-confidence begins to get shaky, take out your initiation letter, open it and read it.

Continue meeting people. Follow the routine you have set for yourself strictly, do not eat in anyone’s house and do not eat food made by anyone else, okay? Also reduce the number of times you fast. If people say things, ignore them; keep moving towards your goal. A bright future is awaiting you. Remember two more things. Continuously practise these, they will help you a lot: 1. Development of faith and 2. Development of self.

Faith has a lot of power. The greater your faith in sadguru and God, the greater success you will achieve. You should continuously develop your faith and a constant feeling for your ishta. Develop the feeling, “My God is all-powerful and He can do what He wants.” Have complete faith in this. Remember, for a householder faith is a boon and doubt a curse. Faith means having total belief in the powers of your God and complete self-surrender to his wishes and words. As your faith develops, fear, unhappiness and apprehension will fade away. Do not let the mind be vacant even for a short while. If it strays while you are working, do mental japa. Then it will not go anywhere. After all, the mind is the very root of all sorrow. Sorrow is its creation.

Whenever you have the time, study the *Bhagavad Gita* and understand it. Do not simply chant it. The first few times you may not be able to understand it, but gradually you will understand all of it. This will definitely have an influence on the child. A child is an image of the mother’s temperament and behaviour. You have to first become the kind of person that you want him to be. Have high expectations and the child will be greater than the greatest. Whatever I had to say, I have said or written and communicated it to you. Now you know it all. Fulfil your duties towards the child well. The child is not yours; he belongs to the world and is kept with you in trust, for safe-keeping. Give him good samskaras, teach him good things, give him a good education, this is your chief duty. Make him a true human being. All creatures eat, drink, sleep, wake up and produce babies. This is an animal’s life. Rise beyond it. You do not need to make him a God. It is easy to become a god, but a true human being . . . !

Dharmashakti, keep doing your work well, you will receive inspiration and instructions from within, do not worry. Absorb yourself totally in sadhana and have unflinching self-confidence. You will be able to hear my voice and instructions. Spend your whole day in japa meditation and work, forget yourself, the only condition is that you maintain an unflinching self-confidence. Whatever else you

want to know, you will get the answers in your own mind. You are filled with power that has been hidden by worldly attachments and attractions. Clean it. Your path is bright.

Dharmashakti, the jewel that you will receive by the grace of God will help remove the ignorance of so many. Hari Om.

How did you advise Swami Dharmashakti to use bhakti to alleviate fear?

Swami Satyananda: Maintain regularity in your work. Keep up your daily routine. Let the ajapa japa go on continuously and fix the mind on one point. Do your work, stay happy. The circumstances will be in your favour. You should not be scared at all. Your God, self-confidence and guru are always with you. You don't have to go anywhere; your house is a temple in which they all live, so why the fear? The satsang, bhajan and kirtan that you had there every day are all still there. Concentrate the mind and hear them. You will be able to hear everything. Only remember this: God is one, not many. He is within me, in my house. A prayer to one of His names is a prayer to all His names. He is the witness to all your thoughts, joys and sorrows and is also your companion. He is the inspirer of your actions and activities of vice and also of virtue, of sorrow and also of joy. For those who walk the path of God the question of vice and virtue should not arise. He is beyond vice and virtue.

How did you advise her on the path of bhakti in relation to bringing up her son, Niranjana?

Swami Satyananda: Dharmashakti, with the arrival of Niranjana, know that you have been reborn. Mould yourself in a way that the future of the child may be greater than the greatest. Stretch out your arms and legs on the bed itself and do asanas. Constant japa meditation, no matter what your circumstances. No other rules. With every breath, *Om Shri Ramchandraya Namah*. Your life is pledged to God. A particle of God, the Rama-Krishna of this age, is in your lap. Your mind, body, thoughts and entire life are pledged to him.

Dharmashakti, the plant is the best there is. The nurturing and weeding should also be the best. I have the confidence in you that you will be able to make this divine jewel truly divine. The grace of God is with you. My auspicious blessings to Niranjan.

Niranjan is the illumination of the greatness of God. Take care of your health. Think of the child always as Rama-Krishna. Don't say, "He is small, what will he understand?" This is the time to form samskaras. The atmosphere he lives in, whatever is spoken of in his presence, will all remain in his mind in seed form and will germinate when the time is right. Just as the words of the *Bhagavad Gita* are still present in space, so also are good and bad thoughts. Be careful. This is the time for samskaras.

Finally, after everything has been said, the best dharma is total and absolute surrender, which means to dissolve and merge the ego self. You have to undergo a total dissolution so that I may manifest my ideas and power through you. To dissolve oneself is no joke. The only trick is constant and non-dual remembrance, night and day.

What uplifting qualities did Swami Dharmashakti express?

Swami Niranjanananda: In my whole life, I have never heard Swami Dharmashakti speak ill or think ill of anyone. Everybody who has encountered her has come out filled with contentment, for she gave them hope, she gave them conviction, she gave them faith, she gave them optimism, she gave them the vision of a bright future in their dark life. She always spread positivity around, in a subtle, simple and gentle manner. Such people are rare in this world. There are many seekers, but there are only a few people with great spiritual attainments. She was one of them.

I am proud to be called her son. It is a matter of great honour to be born of such a mother, for it is definitely a boon of God and guru.

How did Swami Dharmashakti meet her guru and how was she involved with his mission?

Swami Niranjanananda: We read how the relationship between guru and disciple carries on for many lifetimes and is an eternal bond. Earlier we felt that this was just something written about in books, but the experience I have had over the last fifty-two years allows me to declare that this is an undeniable truth.

In 1953, my father, Satyabrata, receives an invitation from Rishikesh to participate in a convention which was being organized by Swami Sivananda. He goes to attend this convention and participates wholeheartedly in the work. In those days there were neither tape recorders nor any other gadgets to record the discourses, so people would take down notes in shorthand and then type them out. My father would make shorthand notes of the lectures, talks and discourses given by Swami Sivananda, type them out later, and prepare them for either books or newspaper reports.

In this manner, his association and relationship with Swami Sivananda and the Rishikesh ashram begins. Then one day, he arranges to set off on a trip and takes my mother along. The purpose of the trip is to receive diksha from Swami Sivananda, but when the two of them arrive at Swami Sivananda's ashram, Ma Dharmashakti looks not at Swami Sivananda but at one of his disciples and loses herself completely. At that time Swami Sivananda says, "Don't worry. Her guru will come to her home and give her diksha." That is exactly what happened.

In 1956, when our guru, Swami Satyananda, received the blessings and mandate from Swami Sivananda to spread the teachings of yoga, he left Rishikesh and travelled throughout India. His first destination was Rajnandgaon. After reaching the station, he sent a little message on a slip of paper saying, "Swami Satyananda has arrived in Rajnandgaon and is waiting at the station. Please come."

In those days my father used to work for a mill. We are from a middle class family. My father worked in the BNC

mill as a typist and stenographer. So this householder goes off to receive Sri Swamiji, to welcome him and take him to his humble abode. That little house became the head office of the International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM). When the IYFM was established in 1956, the responsibility of its care and nurture rested on the shoulders of Swami Satyabratananda and Swami Dharmashakti.

When Sri Swamiji gave them diksha, he expressed the outpourings of his heart and said, “You are the truth of my vow (*vrata*) and that is why your name will be Swami Satyabratananda, and you are the strength of my conviction (*dharma*) and your name will be Swami Dharmashakti.” The words uttered on that day have proven their veracity today.

There are always struggles in life, but it is only through struggle that an individual progresses and moves ahead. It is struggle that tests a person’s character. In the same way that a stone is hewn with a chisel and hammer to be turned into a beautiful statue, it is struggle that gives impetus to the character and creativity of man. This was true for Swami Dharmashakti also.

What was the power of Swami Dharmashakti’s connection with guru?

Swami Niranananda: While Swami Satyananda was alive, we all saw him as a good person, a saintly person, a knowledgeable person, a yogi and an inspirer. Yet, after his physical departure I have noticed something else; not just the perception that ‘he was great and good’, but something that defines the guru-disciple relationship. It identifies and defines the connection that a guru has with a disciple. Undoubtedly, after his mahasamadhi, people all over the world have felt his presence even stronger in their lives. However, recent events have made me think of what a connection there is between a guru and a disciple. I see this connection with the samadhi of my own mother, Swami Dharmashakti.

Swami Dharmashakti used to say, “I am not going to leave this body until my guru comes to take me.” I used

to think that this was her inner desire, her inner wish, yet how could that be possible? However, when she left her mortal body on 12th February, these words came true. That evening, as per the ashram tradition, we dressed the bed in Sri Swamiji's room. The mosquito net was put up, a quilt was there, two pillows were there, a bed sheet was there, and after preparing everything, the room was closed and everybody left. This was the day Swami Dharmashakti left her body.

The next morning, when people went to clean the room, they found the ambience there totally changed. A different feeling of high energy was present, so high that your hair would stand on end when you entered the room. The mosquito net was moved, as if somebody had picked it up and used it. The quilt was moved to the side of the bed. The pillows, which were laid side by side, were now placed on top of each other, displaying the clear imprint of a head. Similarly, there was a clear imprint of someone having sat on the bed for an extended period. You could see the indentation, the depression of the legs, buttocks, thighs – a clear, perfect image of somebody having sat there.

I had heard from other residents that Swami Dharmashakti would say, “How can I go? My guru has to come to take me.” That night, we did see this happen. Some presence and power came and gave a clear indication, “I am here. I was here.” The guru gave a clear understanding, “I have come to fulfil my promise. I made a promise to her in 1971 that I will look after her and come to take her.”

When I see these incidents and recall past memories, I see the connection that transcends both life and death. This connection is unique and truly beautiful; it is the connection that can exist between guru and disciple. We are disciples, yet sometimes I wonder, ‘Do we have the strength, ability and conviction to experience the faith that Swami Dharmashakti had?’ That unshakeable, unbroken, unflinching faith, very similar to that of Shabari in the *Ramayana*, is a rare quality.

Shabari was a tribal girl who was told by her guru that Sri Rama would come to her hermitage. When the guru made this prophecy, she was about sixteen or seventeen. She had implicit faith in her guru's words. Her guru did not mention when. He may have meant tomorrow, or the day after, or after one year, or after one life. Yet, just on the strength of her faith in the words of the master, Sri Rama came to her hermitage. When he came, she was over eighty, she had waited every day and prepared the hermitage every day, with the same intensity of faith and conviction in the words of the guru that "Sri Rama is going to come." This trait, this character, this nature I saw in Swami Dharmashakti. She used to breathe in guru and breathe out guru, and her joy and passion would be to tell the stories of Sri Swamiji.

What was her expression of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Her *guru bhakti*, devotion to guru, was unparalleled. When her own father saw Sri Swamiji, he said, "Daughter, I am handing you over to your real father; he is your father, not I." From that day forth, Swami Dharmashakti looked upon Sri Swamiji as her father and she lived the rest of her life as his daughter, imbued with trust, faith and dedication, imbued with love.

Whoever met and visited Swami Dharmashakti always left with a message of positivity, whether it was of inspiration, peace, love, joy or delight. She always inspired enthusiasm, courage, the flowering of positive qualities and awareness in all. In fifty-two years, I have never heard her make a single uncharitable comment about anyone, that so and so is like this, that he is wrong or not quite okay, not even that. She used to say that each person does whatever they can, according to their capacity.

Some people are ants, some are monkeys and some are elephants. If the elephant says that the ant is not doing its work properly, that thinking is wrong on the part of the elephant. The ant has done the best it can, in the place it

is. In this way, she used to tell us that there is nothing to be gained by becoming upset with anyone, for each one works as much as they can, according to their ability. In fact, you can encourage them to fulfil their jobs in the best possible way so that it can also inspire others. This was the nature of her teachings.

What was unique about Swami Dharmashakti's leaving her body?

Swami Niranjanananda: When I had told Swami Dharmashakti that as per Sri Swamiji's orders, I would be commencing the panchagni sadhana this year, she gave me her blessings and said, "Whatever you have been told to do by Guruji, you must surely fulfil even though you might risk your life in the process." When I completed my panchagni sadhana, I went to her and said, "With your blessings I have completed my panchagni sadhana and am going ahead on the path that my guru's sankalpa has set before me." She blessed me and said, "I have been waiting for this very day." Perhaps she was awaiting the completion of the panchagni.

When I told her, "From tomorrow the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the ashram will begin" she replied, "My blessings are with all for these celebrations. I wish that the grandeur of this year's Golden Jubilee will shine again with the same pomp and glory in fifty years time for the centenary celebrations."

I was with her from about 11 am until 11.45 am on 12th February. After that, I continued with the rest of the Basant Panchami program. Exactly at 12 o'clock I received a phone call. Not a second before or after, but at exactly 12 noon she breathed her last with complete ease. Without any anxiety she left her body.

It is an ashram tradition that every night we prepare our Gurudev's room and make his bed. On 12th February at 12 o'clock, Swami Dharmashakti dropped her mortal coil, and in the evening Sri Swamiji's bed was prepared. On 13th February in the morning, when swamis went to clean the

room, they saw that the bed had been used. The mosquito net had been moved aside, the quilt was lying to one side and there were impressions on the bed as if someone had been sitting in meditation, the impressions from the knees to the buttocks were clearly visible. That brought home to us the promise Sri Swamiji had made to Swami Dharmashakti in 1971 that he would come to take her. That promise made by a guru to his disciple was fulfilled. He had come to take her.

Then on 13th February, she was given the ceremonial *bhu samadhi*, earth burial, at Satyam Udyan of Ganga Darshan in the prescribed manner. There is a provision for sannyasins to be given *bhu samadhi* – sannyasins who are siddhas and saints, not the ordinary roadside sannyasins. We all belong to the second category, but those who awaken the guru tattwa and Shiva tattwa within themselves on the strength of their faith, for such great personalities, for such saints and sannyasins, there is a provision for *bhu samadhi*.

Swami Dharmashakti was born on Buddha Poornima, and at the age of eighty-nine she left this mortal frame. I don't consider her as my mother, but I feel it is my great privilege that Guruji gave me the opportunity, gave this soul an opportunity, to be born from the womb of such a saintly and enlightened woman. This is why she is not my mother, but Devi to me, a Devi who ordained the gift of fearlessness in people through the strength of her love and compassion. She has given protection and strength to others.

I believe there must be few people on earth to be as fortunate as I to have a mother such as she and to have lived the grace of such a guru.



A bhakta rises to a vision of unity. He is filled with compassion for all creatures. This brings him nearer to the feet of the Lord. There is no land which is not one's own, for the whole earth is one's kith and kin. The oneness of the immortal spirit throbs in the heart of all. Humanity is one family, God's family. God Himself dwells in all. There is one life, one consciousness in all forms. God is immanent in all. Therefore, do not hurt anybody. Feel oneness and unity. Be kind to all, serve all and love all. Feel universal brotherhood.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

5

Acceptance of Reality

The fourth form of bhakti yoga is being aware of the miracle of God's glory without manipulation or deviousness. In this form of bhakti yoga, one learns to accept reality as it exists. To be aware of the glory of reality and learn to accept it as an ongoing process. Every step of life is some kind of miracle.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

HUMILITY AND INNOCENCE

Why do saints and gurus say that one should become 'like children'?

Swami Satyananda: Jesus said, "Become ye like little children." The simplicity and straightforwardness of childhood are dear to God. Therefore, I have told others and tell everyone not to come to me as sophisticated individuals.

If you want to come to me, keep your heart open in the palm of your hand, to surrender it to me. Come to me like little children. Come to me untrammelled by your external accretions. Empty yourself and come to me then you will be pure, then you receive new clothes to wear and novel light will be reflected upon you.

What is the role of innocence and humility on the bhakti yoga path?

Swami Niranjanananda: The fourth stage of bhakti yoga is being free from inner crookedness, guilelessness, having a mind that is innocent, simple and free from perversion. It is establishing more and more sattwa in one's life by getting away from influences which encourage manipulation, falsity and crookedness. At this stage, an attempt is being made to go beyond buddhi, the cause of crookedness. *Buddhi*, intellect, has been used in the first three stages of bhakti yoga. Now the rational, logical conditioning of mind has to be transformed into simplicity and innocence. When innocence and simplicity take root in the mind, crookedness goes away. When Christ said, "Be innocent like a child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven," to be innocent, simple and to shun crookedness, it means the mind is coming out of the influence of tamas.

It can happen if one follows the path of meditation, introspection, observation and self-analysis. How does one become humble? The urge to control and manipulate the environment, friendships and associations, emotionally and intellectually, is natural in everyone. When one manipulates, guile and crookedness take root in the mind. The manipulative mentality can be overcome by the meditative process. Through pratyahara the mind is cleared of its influences, impressions, stresses and negativity. Through dharana one tries to purify and clean the heart space, the emotions and feelings. As the head and heart are cleaned, the mind becomes free, simple and innocent.

Innocence also means an awakened mind. A crooked mind has limited vision. An innocent mind has broad vision. Innocence implies awareness, understanding and knowledge. It is not a dumb mind, where one does not think, realize or act. It is a pure, untainted mind. To maintain innocence one has to be watchful of everything that is happening and maintain one's balance, optimism and clarity. Innocence is a clear state of mind, an awakened state of mind, where one is

on guard all the time. This can happen through meditation – through pratyahara for the mind and dharana for the heart and sentiments.

What does it mean ‘to be innocent’?

Swami Satyananda: The miracles that one sees in the lives of great saints are a product of innocence. Innocence is not childishness; it is the blossoming of the purity in man’s structure. To be innocent one does not have to do anything or be anything. Rather, whatever one has acquired one has to throw away: knowledge, proceeds, wealth, power, status and political and religious background. One has to believe, ‘I am nothing.’ When this attitude takes hold within, it becomes the centre of faith.

What was the teaching of Jesus?

Swami Niranjanananda: Christ did not say, “Have God-realization.” When people asked him, “How can we see our Father?” he gave a simple but practically impossible answer: “In order to enter the kingdom of heaven you have to be innocent like a child.” Innocence is the absence of all vicious, destructive and negative tendencies in life. True innocence is connecting with the pure essence of life, the purity of life, and behaving in a manner dignified to a human being. To express human nature is innocence. Although the answer is simple, to become innocent is the most difficult thing. Innocence begins with the mind and reaches out to the heart. Mind and heart combined give the result, give the action.

Jesus is indicating the direction for aspirants: to become part of the cosmic goodness by becoming good. By doing good one becomes part of the cosmic goodness. Once one becomes a part of the cosmic goodness by sharing one’s goodness then one can also say, ‘my Father and I are one’, for both have the same vision – spreading goodness. This is the essence of the teachings of Jesus – bhakti yoga, jnana yoga and the cultivation of spiritual awareness.

Why should one cultivate humility?

Swami Sivananda: Even if aspirants are people of great erudition, they must be humble. A learned person with humility is very much revered by all.

If people want to drink water at the tap, they will have to bend themselves. Even so, if they want to drink the spiritual nectar of immortality, they will have to bend. They must be meek and humble.

Humility is the highest of all virtues. ‘Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth’ (Matthew, Chapter 5:15). One can destroy egoism by developing the one virtue alone. One can influence the whole world and become a magnet to attract many persons. Lives will be drawn to such a person. Humility must be genuine. Feigned humility is hypocrisy and cannot stand.

God helps only when one feels utterly humble. Therefore, the aspirant should develop this virtue to a considerable degree, become an embodiment of humility, become humility personified. Through this one virtue alone one can get salvation. Humility destroys egoism, brings *sama-bhav*, *atmavasya*, peace of mind, good sleep and rest, *atmabhava* or *Narayana bhava* in all beings and eventually self-realization.

How can one cultivate humility?

Swami Niranjanananda: Humility can be cultivated by knowing that one is only a contributor to one’s life, not the master of one’s life. If one thinks one is the master, arrogance comes in, but if one thinks one is a contributor to the betterment of life, then there is a greater appreciation of what to do and how to do it. Humility is seen in one’s actions and life. Humility does not mean becoming weak, not turning the other cheek if somebody slaps you. Humility means not being affected by ego manifestations. Hatred or jealousy cannot touch one. Arrogance cannot alter one’s perception. One remains simple and pure. Simplicity and purity constitute humility.

How did Swami Sivananda teach his disciples about humility?

Swami Satyananda: Throughout his life, Sri Swami Sivananda strove to treat all people with equal respect and he fought ceaselessly against the concepts of untouchability. He would greet everyone and once a year he would collect the sweepers, mehtars (night soil collectors) and scavengers of society, call them to the ashram and wash their feet. Is it so difficult for the arrogant, self-deluded Hindu to wash the feet of a mehtar? He used to wash their feet and he would make the swamis wash their feet also. Then he would give them chadar (shawls), dhoti, blankets, halva, puri, bhojan (special meals), and finally he would do namaskar. He used to say that one has to renounce the ego first, then only can realization come. Unless one renounces the ego, what is the use of meditation, yoga, bhakti and everything else? What is the use of bringing flowers, nice furniture and beautiful pictures to the apartment if one cannot see them? First one must remove the cataract from one's eyes and restore vision. How can one realize the highest being through bhakti and other things unless the ego is removed first?

How does one balance one's strength and humility?

Swami Niranjanananda: This can be achieved by identifying with the humility within and not with the strengths, while at the same time, using the strengths as a natural expression of one's creative ability to help oneself and others. It is a question of identification. If one identifies with one's strengths, one is going to feel proud, experience ego, and develop a feeling of superiority. Then the downfall of the mind will begin in the sense that it will identify more with power, with the knowledge that 'I can do this and do that'. This sense of 'I can' will boost up the self-image in a tamasic rather than sattwic way. If one can identify with the simplicity, sincerity and humility within and try to do what is best, one will be using one's strengths naturally and spontaneously without altering one's mental state.

Why is it important to know oneself in order to be humble?

Swami Satyananda: When the clouds are full with water they come closer to the earth. When the trees are full with fruits the branches swing low. Those people who have outstanding qualities become humble, but those people who do not have those qualities, pose as though they have them. They become egoistic and arrogant. They make a show of their qualities. This is the tendency of most people.

In fact, if one analyzes the whole affair psychologically, one will find that real humility comes through the understanding of one's negative personality. When one looks within one's own self impartially, when one tries to judge oneself impartially, one sees the qualities and what one does not have. Therefore, in order to achieve humility, one has to judge one's own self mercilessly.

If one wants to succeed in this life and in spiritual life, one will have to see one's own personality thoroughly. No man is perfect, and no man is united in himself. Everybody has a duplicate personality, not only with others, but even with himself.

Can anyone make a confession about himself to himself? No, no one can. First of all, there is no knowledge about oneself. "I am a good man," that's what one knows. "I am a wise man", that is all one knows. "I am a strong man; I am a capable man," that is what one thinks.

When one fantasizes, what does one fantasize? When one imagines or when one builds castles in the air, what does one do? One becomes a great man, the richest man, the most powerful man. Is there knowledge that this is not oneself? One is just a limited human being and has many traits of imperfection.

Even a boy who is in primary school should know his limitations. They are his intellectual limitations. He should not make fun of a professor who teaches at a university. This is precisely the reason there is quarrel in the family. This is precisely the reason there is quarrel in the market place, because everyone thinks they are right, but the fact is

that everyone is wrong, because if one person was right, the quarrel would not have started.

There is a joke related to two drivers in Japan. Two drivers were driving in opposite directions. Suddenly, at a U-turn they collided with each other. It was not a great accident, yet it happened. Both of them came from behind the steering wheel and greeted each other. One said, "I am sorry, it was my mistake." The other driver said, "No, not at all, it was my mistake." He said, "No, it was my mistake." That was their quarrel.

Both of them had to report to the police. When they went to the police, one driver reported, "I made a mistake, I was at the wrong side and I collided with this car," and the other driver also put in the same type of report. The policeman said, "What am I going to do?" Then one of the drivers said, "Please tell me what fine I should pay." When there is understanding of oneself, then humility comes. Humility is not a cowardly nature. A coward also looks humble, however humility is a dynamic nature in a person.

Humility is having a nature in which one tries to understand one's mistake in relation to the other person. When there is a quarrel between husband and wife, parents and children, the boss and the subordinate, it is a crisis in humility. The wife is trying to say that the husband is wrong, and the husband is trying to prove that she is wrong. If they go to their mother-in-law and father-in-law, they are trying to press their own argument. Then the quarrel multiplies and amplifies. If one of them would withdraw, it would be painful in the beginning, yet at the end it would pay substantial rewards in the form of happiness in the family, however the ego comes in between. Sometimes the thoughts do come in the mind, 'Ah, all unnecessary, I should not have done it.' They know that this is not the way to happiness, yet they do not tackle the problem through humility.

If one of them or both of them could search their own selves and try to find out their own contribution to the quarrel, they would gain humility and understanding.

Therefore, humility is dead; it is dead due to one's hard ego. One has a personality problem, is suffering from inferiority, or the feeling of superiority, or one sees a certain mistake in one's husband or wife, or they become careless about each other for too much intimacy breeds contempt.

There are definite ways of developing the virtue of humility. Aspirants should start with the guru, as it is before the guru they bow the head. They have to practise humility with someone first. They can practise humility with God, yet with God there is no problem as he is not there, so they don't clash with him. With the guru they have to come into a clash for he does exist and he is going to crush their ego. He presses the head and says, "Sit down." For some time aspirants do what he says; after some time they begin to raise their ego a little bit, for ego does not want to be subdued by anybody. Ego is man's support in life and therefore, to develop humility one has to train one's ego.

What is the key to humility?

Swami Niranjanananda: The key to humility is consideration. When one is able to develop the faculty of consideration, a natural attitude of respect develops within, which takes one to humility.

How can one use rationale in a situation to create humility in oneself?

Swami Satyananda: If sometimes the teacher is not able to satisfy, one should not mind. Maybe the teacher is not efficient, or maybe one has a fat ego. It can be anything or it can be both, because many times a person who has a fat ego considers the other person to be an idiot. One has to come to a point of compromise with oneself and with one's acceptance. Taking it for granted that the teacher is inefficient and that one has a fat ego, what should one do? It is better and safer to think this way: 'I am egoistic and he is not inefficient', then one should approach what is called a rational humility. Anybody who claims to be rational should

also know how to be humble. By a rational process one can create humility in oneself.

Humility is not inferiority, and especially rational humility; it is a noble quality. A person who can think and a person who can analyze can become aware of his rational limitations, and accept that he has rational limitations. If he can accept and believe that he also has rational limitations, he can become humble. 'I can think very well, I know many things', that is one way, called rational conviction, 'But I don't know everything, there are many things which I don't know', that is called rational humility. Rational conviction and rational humility must be blended together; then one becomes softer and more flexible.

How do simplicity and innocence bring one in touch with divine grace?

Swami Satyananda: The simple person who does not use his head too much finds God very soon. If aspirants want to call God, they must speak the language of the heart. One who has the heart of a child receives God's love. God's grace is for the one who is simple as a child, who considers toys to be real, the moon to be cheese, who marries his dolls and starts crying when the doll is broken. God's grace is for those with childlike innocence. God is not a matter of intellect. On that basis one will fail for centuries, for thousands of lives. God is captivated by bhavana, feelings.

It is the feeling one has when one throws away all one's superiority and ego, and says, "I am not an academic, a scientist, an author, a teacher of so many disciples, a mahant or a pontiff. No, I am nothing!"

How did Swami Sivananda's innocence express itself?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda was not intellectual; he was purely a bhakta with an innocent mind. If anyone came to him or wrote to him with problems, at once he would ask everybody to please sit down, close their eyes and repeat the mantra for that person's recovery. He had such faith that

immediately after the mantra was repeated he would have us write a letter saying, "We have conducted the mantra prayer for you and now you will be alright."

Unless you have faith, you cannot believe in this. You are intellectuals. You know all the mantras, but you have no faith in them. If you practise a mantra for someone who is sick, you will not dare to write and tell him, because you cannot be sure he has recovered. Whereas faith leaves no room for doubt, knowledge has fissures in it.

Faith is innocent but it is so powerful that the miracles that one sees in the lives of great saints are a product of that innocence.

What are the two levels of purity one must develop to obtain grace?

Swami Niranjanananda: Guru's grace or God's grace does not descend until there is absolute selfless projection of one's ego, *ahamkara*. For the selfless projection of the ego to take place, all the dross of human nature and personality has to be removed first. It is not an easy process. People say, "Surrender." Surrendering is not easy. People say, "Love." Loving is not easy. People say, "Obey." Obeying is not easy. People say, "Have pure intentions." Even that is not easy.

Nothing is easy in life. One has to work to make things happen. One has to work to purify oneself and to open the channel by which the grace can come. The channel which opens is the channel of sincerity. The channel which opens the flow of grace is the channel of innocence. Learning to be innocent, humble, simple, uninhibited and free from the effects of ego is the *sadhana*, the training given to be able to receive the grace of God or the grace of guru. It is much more complex and difficult than any yoga practice which one may perfect. Aspirants take great pride in having performed the headstand or the wheel pose or the peacock pose. Why can't they take equal pride when they are able to perform some good work with themselves, with their mind and ego? Therefore, although they talk about guru's grace

or God's grace, it is a very distant reality in their lives. One has to strive to purify the mind of *raga* and *dvesha*, of the experiences that give pleasure, satisfaction and contentment, and of the experiences that give displeasure, dissatisfaction and discontent. This is the first level of purity that is demanded, not recommended but demanded.

The second level of purity is being innocent. When one is innocent one does not apply the intellectual mind to decide things according to one's choices and wishes. Rather, one becomes like an empty flute through which new melodies can flow when played by an expert player.

Guru's grace will only last for the time that one has uncorked oneself. Sometimes one even fears removing the cork, thinking, "I will lose myself, I will lose my identity. What will happen to me?" The insecurities come forth and they bind to this plane. If these things did not exist then people would not exist; they would all be enlightened. Therefore, it is important that insecurities have a say in one's life, but only a say. They should not control life. One should be able to control one's life, then one will see the sky burst and a ray of light fall on one's head.

How does one use humility to eradicate ego?

Swami Satyananda: From time to time, one should forget one's power and position and put aside one's social, financial, intellectual or spiritual values. One should go to ashrams, visit places of pilgrimage, shrines, etc., and change the pattern of one's life completely. One should remove the prefixes and suffixes from one's name, for God did not put them there. If one tries to be just oneself, a simple person, in the course of time, one will become humble.

The best way to eradicate the ego is to develop humility. There are many acts of humility and if one can practise even the easiest of them, in the course of time, humility will become part of one's nature. Chaitanya used to say there are four qualities to destroy egoism: Be as humble as a blade of grass, and as tolerant as a giant tree. Give respect

to those of no respect, and remember the name of Hari at all times.

Egoism can be obliterated, but it is difficult. It is a virus and it is more dangerous than cancer. It is said that when identification with the body melts and the inner self is revealed, at that time the ego falls away just as a snake's scales are shed at the proper time. In the same way, ego cannot be removed prematurely.

How can one develop humility?

Swami Satyananda: Give up living on the plane of intellect. How long this obsession? Let thoughts go, let intellect go. One must realize in experience that it is He who makes us do everything. Never believe that you are the doer.

Your actions lose their strings once you abjure all idea of doership. By day and by night you will have to remember this: "He resides unseen within me and He makes me perform all actions." When this idea is firmly rooted in the mind, every act of yours will be an act of yoga.

Always cherish the thought within that you are nobody. Whatever there is, is only that power, you are only the medium. Never forget that while one force desires to manifest itself through you, the other desires to efface you.

What was one of the many ways Swami Sivananda expressed his humility?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda was a man who believed in everybody and never thought that anyone was bad. He was a man without ego and ambition who never posed as a great swami. Thousands of people came to him and were helped out of difficult situations, but his only comment was, "It is God's grace." They would say to him, "Swamiji, you are a great siddha; you are a great master. On account of your blessings, my child has come through his crisis." He would say, "No, no, no. It is God's grace and your prarabdha karma."

How can one overcome vanity and become humble?

Swami Niranjanananda: When thoughts, ideas and attitudes become positive, where is the room for pride or vanity? Pride or vanity is narrowness of mind, in which one does not see anything beyond oneself; one thinks of oneself as the greatest. The mind that is always engrossed with oneself is deluded. This fattens the ego and vanity. The mind that is not engrossed with oneself is simple and straightforward. That mind becomes filled with devotion for the guru or God. This is the culmination of spiritual life and the true form of bhakti.

What are the three principles one should develop?

Swami Niranjanananda: The three principles are: positive associations, a positive, optimistic attitude and cultivating humility. Humility is the absence of arrogance and ego. It is balanced self-esteem, a positive self-image that one cultivates and corrects with the softer sentiments and emotions of life. Humility is a sattwic quality of mind whereas arrogance is a tamasic quality.

These three principles should become the personal philosophy of everyone, and then one is truly on the path of wellbeing. Contentment, peace and joy are the natural outcome of living this philosophy. One should live these three principles and forget what other people say. They are the results of living a balanced, harmonious life. Physical wellbeing will only come about with the practice of hatha yoga. Mental wellbeing will only come with the practice of raja yoga. Emotional wellbeing will not be acquired through bhakti yoga and intellectual satisfaction will not be acquired by jnana yoga. It will all happen once one is able to live the philosophies of humility, positivity and right association.

What is the importance of humility in the character of a person?

Swami Satyananda: A person who is really great does not know he is great. It is difficult for a really great person to know his greatness. He is always a humble man, because he

is not aware of his greatness. He is not humble because he has practised humility or he is acting humbly. He is humble because he thinks he has nothing.

The moment one becomes aware of one's greatness, the ego arises. That is the second type of great people. The really great people are humble and those who are great, but know that they are great, they are terrors. Those who are not great, but who impose the idea of greatness on others in any field of life, suffer from a psychological problem.

A great person is usually in a state of mind where each and every greatness becomes so petty for him, he does not want to conceive of it. He is not aware of it. The greater you are, the humbler you become. That is the secret.

What is the power of humility in Kali Yuga?

Swami Satyananda: In Kali Yuga, one has to conquer the world through the power of scriptural knowledge, through humility, not with pride and force. The sword is silenced by love. This is the teaching of the saints and sages.

How did Saint John of the Cross express the miracle of life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Saint John of the Cross said, "I swear by God, I die every night." That is one miracle, and the fact that one wakes up in the morning is another. The fact that one can analyze things is another miracle, and that one can be aware of every moment as it goes by is another. One does not live just in a mechanical clockwork world. There is also a way to respond directly to the miraculous expressions of every dimension of life. One learns about them, lives being guided by them, and accepts that reality.

Why is humility the foundation of bhakti yoga?

Swami Sivananda: God prefers humility to pride. Mere verbal knowledge of God cannot develop devotion and give attainment of the supreme goal. An intellectual understanding of God is insufficient to attain the supreme goal of life. Bhaktas are humble, and humility is the foundation

of bhakti yoga. The other virtues cling to a person who is endowed with humility.

Humility is the means to *samarpan*, surrender, and in this way it becomes the culmination of all sadhanas or disciplines. The hidden or unmanifest God is made manifest through devotion and humility. Humility is the touchstone of devotion.

SHANKARACHARYA

What is the story of Shankaracharya and his mother?

Swami Satyananda: Motherly love is considered to be divine. Mother and child are unconsciously connected, as are guru and disciple. According to Hindu belief, mother is the first guru or god. Husband, father, brother can be replaced, but not mother. The attachment between mother and child does not belong to the lower category. It is a great attachment and not all are able to practise it.

When Shankaracharya, at the age of eight, was crossing a small river, a crocodile caught hold of his leg and he could not escape. His mother was with him, so he called out to her, “Mother, give me permission to take sannyasa, otherwise this crocodile will finish me.” According to Indian tradition, when it is known that the son will not survive, he is allowed to take sannyasa. If the son has that temperament, he prefers to die a sannyasin.

Shankara had already tried to take sannyasa when he was six years old, but his mother would not give him permission and he had to obey her. However, when she saw her son in the jaws of a crocodile, she thought if she allowed him to take sannyasa, at least he would survive somewhere. So she agreed. This is what Shankara had been waiting for. As soon as he received his mother’s permission to take sannyasa, the crocodile left him. Then Shankara requested his mother to go back home and he proceeded to the ashram of his guru.

According to Hindu tradition, sannyasins are not allowed to join any ceremony, funeral or meeting of condolence, not because they do not believe in them, but because they have

no business there. However, when Shankara's mother was dying, a message was sent to him. He was with her when she died, and he conducted the funeral ceremonies required by tradition. Then he went away.

Some of the Brahmins of his community criticized him for this. They said that sannyasins are not supposed to attend funeral ceremonies, and they objected to him touching the dead body. Shankara said, "No. According to scriptural authority, a sannyasin can attend to all of his mother's obsequies." So, that is the status of a mother, even in the life of a sannyasin. Before the age of ten, a female is not regarded as a mother, but after ten years, she is to be called mother. That is the rule.

What is an example of Shankaracharya's bhakti teachings?

Swami Sivananda: In Kashi, a student was cramming the sutras in Sanskrit grammar. He was repeating again and again "Durkrin karane, durkrin karane . . ." Shankaracharya heard it and was struck by the perseverance of the boy. He immediately sang a small poem, the famous *Bhaja Govindam* song, in order to teach the uselessness of such studies in the matter of the liberation of the soul. The meaning of the song is: "Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda, O fool! When you are about to die the repetition of these Sanskrit sutras will not save you."

What is an example of Shankaracharya's humility?

Swami Sivananda: Shankaracharya was going along the street one day with his pupils to take bath in the Ganges when he met a chandala, an outcast, who was also passing along the street with his dogs by his side. The disciples of Shankaracharya shouted and asked the chandala to clear off the road. The chandala asked Shankaracharya: "O venerable Guru! You are a preacher of Advaita Vedanta and yet you make a great difference between man and man. How can this be consistent with your teachings of Advaita? Is Advaita only a theory?"

Shankaracharya was struck by the intelligent query of the chandala. He thought within himself, “Shiva has assumed this form just to teach me a lesson.” He composed then and there five slokas called the *Manisha Panchaka*. Every sloka ends thus: “He who learnt to look on the phenomena in the light of Advaita is my true Guru, be he a chandala or be he a Brahmin.”

KABIRDAS

How did Kabirdas express his love and devotion to the Divine?

Swami Satyananda: Kabir is one of the most famous bhaktas of India. The word *kabir* means ‘great’ and this exactly describes this exuberant bhakti poet. He is often called *Kabirdas*, which means the slave or servant of the Supreme.

He was born near Benares in 1440. His whole life was an expression of bhakti. He earned his living as a weaver. He sang countless songs, many of which have been recorded by his disciples. They all generate an atmosphere of devotion and bliss and are widely sung throughout India. Even though they were written hundreds of years ago, they continue to transmit overwhelming devotion and feeling. For Kabir everything is blissful, as he sings in the following song:

The Supreme dances in rapture
And when His great joy
Touches the body and mind
They cannot contain themselves.
He holds all that is
Within His eternal bliss.

Though he sang thousands of songs, he emphasized time and time again that it is impossible to talk or write about the supreme consciousness – it can only be tasted and felt. It is only in this way that one will know the sweetness of bliss. He sang:

Since the day when I met my Lord,
There has been no end to the play of our love;
I see with my eyes open and I smile
And I behold His beauty everywhere.
I utter His name, and whatever I see,
It reminds me of Him.
Whatever I do, it becomes His worship,
Wherever I go, I move in Him.
All I achieve is His service and grace.
When I lie down, I lie prostrated at His feet.
It is only He that I adore – none other,
My tongue no longer utters useless words,
It only sings His glory day and night.
Whether sitting or standing,
I can never forget Him
For the rhythm of His music beats in my ears.
Kabir says: I am totally immersed in the intoxicating bliss
That transcends pleasure and pain.

Kabir was a practical man. He advised aspirants to “Go to the master, receive the word (mantra) and worship the Lord. This leads to liberation,” declares Kabir most emphatically.”

As the oil is in the oil seed
And the fire in the flint
So the Supreme is within thee, unrevealed.
Follow the guru's simple and true instructions.
Keep strict vigil at midnight and so find Him.

Kabirdas was not a person of blind faith. He had transcended all religious barriers. In his poems he continually tries to show people that there is no contradiction between Hinduism and Islam. He had reached the culmination of all yogic paths. Knowledge and devotion were the result of expanded awareness. He sang:

The inward and the outward have become
as one sky;

The infinite and the finite are united;
I am drunk with the sight of this all.

What was the life and teaching of Kabirdas?

Swami Sivananda: The life of Kabir (1440–1519) is shrouded in mystery. The word *kabir* means ‘great’ in the Arabic language. Kabir was like Guru Nanak – he was loved by both Hindus and Mohammedans. He was not of one religion or of one nation. He was the prophet of universal brotherhood. He realized the truth that religion, spirituality, love, devotion, faith and divine life were the monopoly of no one religion, but were common to all religions.

Kabir’s religion was a religion of simplicity. His motto was love. His means of salvation was devotion to God and God alone. Kabir’s home was the universe, his brother was mankind and his great father was the Father in heaven. Kabir did not renounce himself to the practice of severe austerities and meditation. He was a dynamic yogi and worked at the loom and at the same time his mind was ever fixed on God.

Kabir was an exponent of nirguna bhakti. He had supreme love for all. He was exceedingly kind, compassionate and fearless. He made vehement criticism of conventions and was a social revolutionary. He endeavoured strenuously for the social, moral and spiritual upliftment of the people. That is the reason why he still lives in the heart of all people. Kabir tried his level best to bring about concord and harmony among the diversity around him. He used his songs as weapons against the Mullahs and priests.

Kabir, the poet-saint of Kashi, is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. He was a skilled musician and poet. His songs are wonderful. They are the spontaneous expressions of his spiritual experience and his love. Kabir used homely metaphors in his songs and sang his religion in popular verse. His doctrines are soul-stirring and magnanimous. Each couplet is pregnant with deep significance. Other characteristic features are

depth of feeling and directness of speech. The expressions have emanated straight from Kabir's heart.

What happened at the death of Kabir?

Swami Sivananda: When Kabir died, his body was claimed by both the Hindus and Muslims. The king of Kashi, with thousands of Hindus wanted to cremate the body. Bizli Khan, with thousands of Muslims wanted to bury it. While they were quarrelling, Kabir's apparition appeared and said, "I was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. I was both. I was nothing. I was all. I discern God in both. There is no Hindu and no Muslim. To him who is free from delusion, Hindu and Muslim are the same. Remove the shroud and behold the miracle."

The shroud was removed and a large quantity of flowers was seen under it. Half of the flowers was taken by the king of Kashi and burnt on the bank of the holy Ganga. The ashes were then buried and a temple was built, known by the name of Kabir Cheura. It is a great place of pilgrimage for the followers of Kabir. The other half of the flowers was taken by the Muslims and buried at Maghar, where Kabir died. A mosque was built over the grave and is a place of pilgrimage for Muslims.



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BHAGAVAD GITA

1. The Many Ninefold Paths

(8:14) I am easily attainable by that ever-steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers Me (for a long time), not thinking of anything else (with a single or one-pointed mind), O Partha (Arjuna)! 9

(10:9) Mindful of Me, their life hidden in Me, illumining each other, ever conversing about Me, they are content and joyful. 10

(18:65) Merge thy mind in Me, be My devotee, sacrifice to Me, prostrate thyself before Me, thou shalt come even to Me. I pledge thee My truth: thou art dear to Me. 10

2. Encounter With Truth

(4:34) Know that by long prostration, service and enquiry, the wise who know the Truth shall instruct thee in that wisdom. 77

3. Identification with Godly Qualities

(2:59) The objects of the senses turn away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind, but his longing also turns away upon seeing the Supreme. 102

(12:17) He who neither rejoices nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing good and evil, full of devotion, he is dear to Me. 103

(12:13–20) He who is free from hatred, is friendly and compassionate towards all beings, is without ‘mineness’ and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving, Ever content and united with Me, self-controlled, having firm resolve, with mind and intellect surrendered to Me, that devotee of Mine is dear to Me.

He who is not a source of agitation for the world, nor is agitated by the world, who is free from exhilaration and anger, fear and anxiety, is dear to Me.

He who is free from wants, pure, clever, impartial and above distractions, who renounces doership in all actions, that devotee is dear to Me.

He who neither rejoices nor hates, grieves nor desires, renounces good and evil, and is full of devotion, is dear to Me.

He who is the same with foe and friend, in honour and dishonour, the same in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, and is free from attachment,

To whom praise and reproach are equal, who is silently contemplative, content with anything, unattached to home, steady-minded and full of devotion, that person is dear to Me. Truly, those who follow this immortal dharma thus declared, endowed with faith, regarding Me as supreme, those devotees are extremely dear to Me. 121

(16:1–3) Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in jnana and yoga, sattwic charity, sense control, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, tapas and straightforwardness, Ahimsa, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation of doership, tranquillity, absence of maliciousness, compassion to all, non-attachment when in contact with sense objects, shame for non-righteous acts, restraint from useless actions, Sublime vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred and pride are (the qualities) of one born for the divine state. 124

4. Adherence to the Teachings

(5:11) The yogi does all his actions devoid of attachment, for self-purification alone. 131

(2:48) Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is the highest yoga. 131

BIBLE

2. Encounter With Truth

(Proverbs 22:24–25) Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare. 64

KATHOPANISHAD

1. The Many Ninefold Paths

(1:2:14) Spiritual life is like walking on a razor's edge. 38

NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS

2. Encounter With Truth

(sutra 39–42) The company of the great souls is again difficult of attainment, is unapproachable and is infallible or unfailing in its effect.

Because it is obtained by the grace of God alone.

There is no difference between God and His devotees.

Let that alone be practised, let that alone be practised. 63

(sutra 43–45) Evil company should be certainly given up by all means.

Because it is the cause of passion, anger, delusion, loss of memory, loss of intellect and total ruin.

Though they (these evil tendencies) rise only in the form of ripples in the beginning, they become like an ocean as a result of evil company. 64

3. Identification with Godly Qualities

(sutra 27) Devotion is higher than the others, because God hates egoism and loves humility. 98

(sutra 78) Virtues like non-violence, truth, purity, compassion, faith in the Vedas and the existence of God, and other excellences of character should be strictly cultivated and protected. 123

RAMACHARITAMANAS

1. The Many Ninefold Paths

(Aranyakanda, after doha 34, chau 4; doha 35; after doha 35, chau 1–3) Seeking company of saintly people; listening to the stories of the Lord; following the path shown by the guru with a humble heart; singing kirtan with a guileless heart; practising mantra japa with unwavering faith; practising self-control, virtue, and pursuing the conduct prescribed by saints; realizing God in everyone without distinction; contentment; and complete trust in God. 39

2. Encounter With Truth

(Balakanda, after doha 2, chau 4) Wisdom does not dawn without association with saints, and such association cannot be had without the grace of Sri Rama;

Contact with noble souls is the root of joy and blessings; it constitutes the very fruit and fulfilment of all endeavours, whereas all other practices are blossoms as it were. 65
(Sundarkand, after doha 47, chau 2–3) Collect the threads of attachment
To parents, wife, children, relatives,
Body, wealth, property and family.
Twist them together to make a rope
And mentally tie it to My feet. 74
(Uttarakanda, after doha 119, chau 8–10)
O my Lord, I have this conviction in my heart
That a servant of Sri Rama is greater than Sri Rama Himself.
While Sri Rama is the ocean, the wise saints are like the rain clouds.
While Hari is the sandal tree, the saints represent the winds (which diffuse the perfume).
Devotion to Hari, which is so delightful, is the reward of all spiritual endeavours.
None has secured it without the help of a saint.
Realizing this, whoever cultivates the fellowship of saints
Easily attains devotion to Sri Rama, O King of birds. 80
(Balakanda, after doha 2, chau 3–5) These are the effects of satsang.
No other way is available
In the world or in the Vedas.
Without satsang, discrimination cannot be attained.
That too is not possible
Without the grace of Rama.
Satsang is the root of blissful wellbeing.
That is the perfection of all fruits,
The flower of all means.
Even wicked people are reformed by satsang,
In the same way that iron is transformed into gold
By the philosopher's stone. 81
(Sundarkanda, doha 4) If all the happiness of the heavens, and ultimate bliss
Are placed on one side of the balance,
Then taken together they cannot measure
The happiness obtained from one iota of satsang. 82

(Uttarakanda, doha 61) Without satsang, no story of Rama is possible, And without that, there is no destruction of delusion. Without the destruction of delusion No strong devotion to the feet of Rama is possible.	84
(Balakanda, doha 2) Wise people take a bath in the holy water of satsang. In this way they clean and purify their inner being. Liquid water cleans the body; the 'water' of satsang cleans the mind.	85
(Balakanda, after doha 2, chau 5) Satsang is like the philosopher's stone. Even the most wicked people have been transformed by the power of satsang, in the same way that the philosopher's stone changes iron into gold.	86
(Ayodhyakanda, after doha 193, chau 4) By repeating the name of the Lord, Although in reverse order, Valmiki became like Brahma Which is known to all the world.	87

3. Identification with Godly Qualities

(Aranyakanda, doha 15, chau 6) I am always under the control of that person Who sings My praise with a rejoicing heart, Whose speech is obstructed by intense joy, Whose eyes are full of joyful tears, Who is free from desire, anger and hypocrisy.	128
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YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

1. The Many Ninefold Paths

(1:33) Be friendly with those who are content. Be compassionate towards those who are in pain. Be happy for those who are virtuous. Practise indifference to the crooked. Cultivate these attitudes and the mind becomes purified and peaceful.	32
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2. Encounter With Truth

(1:33) In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitude of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectively, the mind becomes purified and peaceful.	54
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Glossary

Abhimana – pride; egoism

Advaita – non-duality

Advaita Vedanta – non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Shankar-acharya based on the experience of Brahman as the Absolute Reality; the union of Brahman and atma, (the universe and the individual soul)

Ajapa japa – continuous, spontaneous repetition of mantra; meditation practice in which mantra is coordinated with breath

Aradhana – service, adoration

Aranyakanda – third section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*

Arati – worship involving waving of lights with reverence before a deity

Archana – worship

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi; the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda: serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul

Atmanivedan, atmanivedanam – complete self-surrender
Avatara – descent or incarnation of God to the mortal plane
Ayodhyakanda – second section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
Balakanda – first section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
Basant Panchami – the fifth day of spring; celebration of the Goddess Saraswati
Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga
Bhaja Govindam – literally ‘Adore Govinda’, a spontaneously composed song and philosophical text by Adi Shankaracharya; also known as *Mohamudgar*
Bhajan – devotional song
Bhakta – devotee
Bhakti – intense inner devotion in which the intellect, emotions and self are channelled towards a relationship with the divine; highest love
Bhakti marga – path of worship, ritual and adoration leading to the experience of bhakti
Bhakti sadhana – worship or adoration of devotion
Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen and purify the emotions
Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind
Bheda bhakti – the worshipper and the object of worship maintain separate identity; bhakti of duality; bhakti yoga described by Sage Vasishtha to Sri Rama
Bhiksha – begging, soliciting
Brahmacharya – being absorbed in higher consciousness; sublimation of sexual energy for spiritual development; celibacy; conduct suitable for proceeding to the highest state of existence

Brahmin – the priestly caste; one whose consciousness is immersed in Brahman

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad – Upanishad from the *Yajur Veda*; considered to be one of the ten most important Upanishads and especially revered by the Saraswati branch of the Dashnami tradition

Dambha – arrogance, pride

Darshan – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy

Dasya bhava – feeling and attitude of relating to God as a servant

Dharana – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

Diksha – initiation; dedication of oneself to a particular object

Dvaita – duality

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti (nature) are sattwa, rajas and tamas

Guru Granth Sahib – central religious text of Sikhism

Ishta deva, ishta devata – one's personal chosen deity and form of worship

Ishwara pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; surrender to God; complete dedication of one's actions and will to the Lord

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied

Jnana – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life

Kali Yuga – the present age or yuga; during this cycle man is collectively at the height of technology, decadence, dishonesty and corruption of spiritual awareness

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect

Karmakanda – another name for bhakti marga; the path of ritual and worship to attain the state of bhakti

Kirtan, kirtanam – singing of God’s name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras

Lilas – literally, ‘play’; activity of prakriti and its three gunas

Madhava – another name of Sri Krishna

Mahasamadhi – final liberation experienced on the departure of the spirit from the body

Mahatma – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all

Mantra – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedanta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya

Muni – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind

Namrata – obeisance, respect; humility

Narada Bhakti Sutras – one of the main bhakti yoga texts, authored by Sage Narada

Navanga Tantra – nine-fold path or code of conduct in Tantra

Nididhyasana – profound, deep meditation, the third of the three steps on the path of knowledge in vedantic sadhana

Nirguna bhakti – devotion to God without form or attribute

Nirvana – cessation of suffering, final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought; higher state of existence or awareness

Nishkama – without desire, expectation or personal interest

Niyama – observance of rules; rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation

Padaseva, padasevanam – showing respect; service of the guru; adherence to the guru's teaching

Para bhakti – supreme devotion, bhakti. It is said to accompany or follow the highest knowledge and be a state of consciousness which is self-contained

Pooja – worship

Poornata – fullness

Prarabdha karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit

Prasad – favour, grace; blessed gift or object, something full of grace

Pratipaksha bhavana – taking the opposite attitude; a means to balance the mind

Prem – love, affection; tenderness; regard

Puranas – eighteen ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions

Ramacharitamanas – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in sections

Rati – intense attachment, pleasure

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint

Sakhya, sakhya bhava – attitude or way of relating to God as a friend; relationship between Arjuna and Sri Krishna

Sakshatkara – anything which is experienced personally; direct realization, experience of the absolute, knowledge of Brahma Jnana

Samabhav – the feeling of equality, balance and equanimity

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga

Samarpan – surrender

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way

Sanga – association, company

Sangha – community, group of people

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; will-power

Sankirtan – see Kirtan

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the phenomenal world

Sannyasi, sanniyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey

Santosha, samtushta – complete contentment, complete absence of any desire

Sanyam – restraint, self-discipline; harmonious control of concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and samadhi fused into one process

Satsang, satsanga – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good

Seva – literally, 'being That'; service; selfless service; to become one with the divine transcendental nature, and to express that nature in thought, word and deed

Sevak – one who practises seva

Shaiva, Shavaite – relating to the god Shiva; one who worships Shiva as the supreme reality

Shakti – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman

- Shivalinga, shivalingam** – black oval-shaped stone; symbol of Shiva; symbol of consciousness
- Shravan, shravanam** – to listen, to hear the scriptures; the second of the three steps on the path of knowledge in vedantic sadhana
- Shudra** – the servant caste; one of the four varnas or divisions of the caste system in India
- Siddha** – an adept or perfected person; one who has developed his/her psychic and pranic capacity to the point of mastery
- Sloka** – verse
- Smaran, smaranam** – remembrance, recollection; one of the nine paths of bhakti yoga
- Srimad Bhagavata, Bhagavatam** – one of the eighteen major Puranas dealing with the avatars of Vishnu, it speaks in great detail about the life of Sri Krishna. See Puranas
- Sundarkanda** – fifth section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Sutra** – thread; condensed statements strung together to give an outline of a philosophy
- Swadhyaya** – self-study; continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; study of scriptures; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary practice of yoga
- Tapasya** – practice of austerity
- Upanishads** – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally 108 in number; containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual teacher)
- Upasaka** – one who does worship
- Upasana** – personalized form of worship
- Uttarakanda** – seventh section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Vaikuntha** – heaven; abode of Vishnu
- Vaishnavite** – the sect that reveres incarnations of Vishnu as the Supreme Reality
- Vandana, vandanam** – adoration, salutation; one of the means to attain the state of bhakti

- Vedanta** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; the school of thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita)
- Vedantin** – practitioner of Vedanta, a philosophy stating one non-dual eternal principle underlying and causing all creation
- Vedas** – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, *Atharva*, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BCE
- Vritti** – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular mental state or condition
- Yajna** – sacrifice; yajna has three components: ritual or worship, satsang and unconditional giving
- Yama** – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil.
- Yantra** – a geometric symbol of cosmic power designed to unleash the hidden potential energy within consciousness; used in meditation and concentration practices
- Yoga Sutras** – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali
- Yoga Vasishtha** – a monumental scripture on Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru Sage Vasishtha
- Yogi** – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice

Glossary of Names and Places

Ahalya – wife of Sage Gautama, redeemed from a curse by Sri Rama's grace

Akrura – uncle of Sri Krishna

Anandamayi Ma – (1896–1982) celebrated Indian woman saint

Appayya Dikshitar – (16th century CE) saint of South India; devotee of Shiva; ancestor of Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother; son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received divine revelation from Sri Krishna

Aurobindo, Sri – (1872–1950) a famous yogi from Pondicherry, concerned with the transformative power of yoga on all levels of the human being

Ayodhya – birthplace of Sri Rama

Badrinath – temple at Badri in the Himalayas; one of the four seats established by Adi Shankaracharya

Benares – see Varanasi

Bharat – brother of Sri Rama; son of King Dasharatha and Kaikeyi

Bhima – one of the five Pandavas; son of Kunti and the Wind God

Bhishma – the son of Santanu and Ganga; he was known for his wisdom, firmness of resolve and unflinching devotion to God

Brahma, Brahman – etymologically, 'ever expanding, limitless consciousness'; name of Supreme Consciousness or

cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality

Buddha – (566–483 BCE) ‘The enlightened one’; commonly referred to the founder of Buddhism

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Gouranga – (1485–1534) reformer of the Vaishnava faith; one of the contributors of the bhakti movement in India during the Mughal era

Chitrakoot – place of exile of Sri Rama where Tulsidas had darshan of Sri Rama and Lakshman

Dhruva – bhakta famous for his steadfast worship of Narayana; the pole star is named after him

Gajendra – elephant king who was rescued from a ferocious crocodile by Vishnu

Ganga – river Ganges, most sacred river in India

Garuda – vehicle of Vishnu

Gopis – companions of the young Krishna in Vrindavan

Govinda – another name of Sri Krishna

Guru Govind Singh – (1666–1708) 10th Guru of Sikhism

Guru Nanak – (1469–1538) founder of Sikhism

Hanuman – name of a powerful monkey chief possessing extraordinary strength and powers which he manifested on several critical occasions on behalf of Sri Rama, the Lord of his heart

Hari – name of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the preservation of the universe; Supreme Consciousness

Harischandra – king of the solar dynasty; famous for his unflinching adherence to truth

Kabir, Kabirdas – (1440–1518) poet and mystic, whose teachings blend Hinduism, Sufism and bhakti

Kaikeyi – one of the three wives of King Dasharatha and mother of Bharat

Kakabhushundi – he was cursed by his guru, Sage Lomasha, to incarnate as a crow; devotee of Sri Rama and narrator of Sri Rama’s story

Kanchipuram – ancient city in South India

Kashi – see Varanasi

Krishna, Sri – literally, ‘black’ or ‘dark’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*

Lakshmi – goddess of fortune, prosperity and beauty, the consort of Vishnu

Madhava – another name of Sri Krishna

Mirabai – (1547–1614) princess; Indian poet saint; devotee of Sri Krishna

Nachiketa – principal character of the *Kathopanishad*

Narada, Sage – author of *Narada Bhakti Sutras*; devotee of Vishnu

Narayana – another name of Vishnu

Parikshit, Raja – grandson of Arjuna; received the teaching of *Srimad Bhagavatam* from Sukadeva

Prahlada – son of demon Hiranyakashipu; great devotee of Vishnu. His faith helped him withstand many trials; Vishnu saved him in the form of Narasimha, half man and half lion

Prithu – first king, from whom the earth received her name Prithvi

Raidas, Ravidas – (15th/16th century) poet-saint; born in Varanasi to a cobbler family; disciple of Kabirdas

Rama, Sri – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king

Ramakrishna, Paramahansa – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda

Ramanujan – (1017–1137) philosopher and Vaishnava bhakta of South India

Ravana – the ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita, Sri Rama’s wife, and was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to the phenomenal reality

Rishikesh – sacred place in northern India where the river Ganga leaves the Himalayas and enters the plains

Shakti – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power; ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman

Shankaracharya, Adi – (782–820) name of a celebrated teacher of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, he was an enlightened sage who is said to have established the Dashnami order of sannyasa and authored a large number of scriptural works

Shiva – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic; original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality

Sudama – childhood friend of Sri Krishna

Sukadeva, Shukadeva – son of Vedavyasa; he narrated the *Bhagavata Purana* to Raja Parikshit

Tripurasundari – one of the names of the Cosmic Mother

Tukaram – (17th century) Indian poet saint of Maharashtra

Tulsidas – (1532–1623) author of one of the versions of the famous epic *Ramayana* called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India

Uddhava – devotee of Sri Krishna; a childhood friend of Sri Krishna who later learned bhakti from the gopis

Vaikuntha – heaven; abode of Vishnu

Vali – monkey chief, who at the behest of his younger brother Sugriva, was slain by Sri Rama

Valmiki – name of a celebrated sage who meditated for so long that he became interred in a termite mound. He was author of the first *Ramayana*

Varanasi – holy city connected especially with Shiva; also known as Benares and Kashi

Vasishtha, Sage – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; guru of Sri Rama; author of many vedic hymns his

teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga

Vedavyasa, Vyasa – compiler of the four Vedas in their present form

Vidura – younger brother of Pandu of the *Mahabharata*; known for his wisdom and righteousness

Vishnu – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness

Vivekananda, Swami – (1863–1903) disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; he brought his guru's teachings to the West

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“One should sing God's name and study the scriptures on bhakti and the lives of saints, and obtain inspiration from them.”

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati



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